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The Young Sartre

1987

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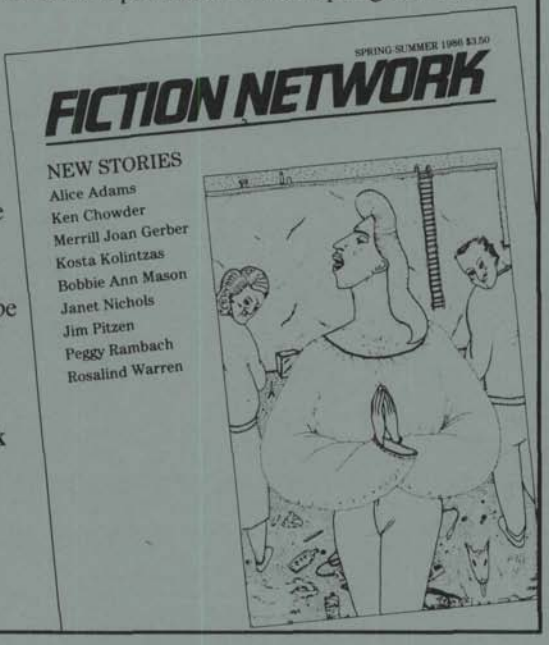

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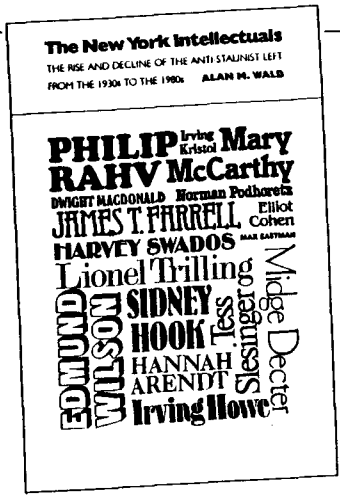

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COMMENT

ON THINGS NOT PUBLISHED AND OTHER MATTERS

During the past few months *Partisan Review* has received considerable press coverage over an unpublished symposium on American foreign policy. Although it is unusual for a journal to discuss articles it decided finally not to print, the controversy surrounding this issue impels us to lay out the facts as succinctly and clearly as we can.

For some time, *Partisan Review* has been interested in publishing forums of diverse opinions on such matters as relations with the Soviet Union, defense and weapons policies, attitudes toward Third World nationalism and revolution, terrorism, and other vital problems facing the world at large. More than once we have circulated a series of questions which quickly became dated because of rapidly changing political developments, or which failed to elicit strong enough replies to shed new light on these vexing issues.

In March 1986 William Phillips asked Michael Ledeen, whom he had read in *The New Republic*, to review a number of books on foreign policy. When Ledeen responded that he preferred to write an essay on the subject, Phillips agreed. The essay was received in June. In view of our previous difficulties in organizing good symposia, Phillips thought that this essay would stimulate pointed discussion, and asked Ledeen whether he would mind comments by people whose opinions were distributed along a wide political spectrum. Ledeen agreed to the idea, and Phillips asked for reactions to the essay by such people as Daniel Bell, Peter Berger, Nathan Glazer, Lionel Abel, Ronald Radosh, Irving Kristol, Paul Hollander, Dennis Wrong, Steven Marcus, Morris Dickstein, Diana Trilling, William Chase, Albert Shanker and Leon Wieseltier.

Essentially, Ledeen argued, as he did in his book *Grave New World*, that the formulation of foreign policy is enmeshed with domestic issues and in a state of confusion—confusion magnified by the involvements of Congress, the press, and the bureaucracy. He referred to how poorly versed American leaders tend to be in foreign policy matters, and how chosen "experts" in foreign affairs often don't even know the language of the country of their alleged expertise; and how our "national interest" frequently is subordinated to formalistic legal questions. He addressed problems of helping

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"democratic revolutions," as we did in Haiti and the Philippines, and urged that the same be done in Nicaragua. And he suggested that in such a context a certain amount of secrecy might be called for in order to protect the participants.

At the time, no one knew that Ledeen had served to initiate contact with "moderate" groups in Iran, or indeed that any arms sales to Iran had taken place. The whole scandal was yet to come. Daniel Bell objected to Ledeen's essay and quietly withdrew from our board—though he expects to continue to write for us and to remain our friend. Some of our editors thought William Phillips should have consulted them before the symposium was initiated, either because of their feelings about Ledeen, their disagreements with his views, or their assessment of the quality of the article. Some of those who did not like Ledeen or his views wrote extremely critical replies. This was precisely the sort of symposium Phillips had hoped for, since the issues were addressed from a wide variety of political perspectives.

The Iran scandal broke sometime in November, and Ledeen's name was mentioned as an initial go-between. Since our January issue had to go to press, and we did not know what else would surface, we decided to postpone the symposium. As often happens when a quarterly deals with rapidly shifting issues and topical concerns, Ledeen's essay as well as the answers to it became somewhat dated and, in the changing context of events, took on different meanings than it had before; therefore, the majority of the editors, though not all of them, thought we should put the matter behind us and start afresh at a later date.

This is precisely what polemical and one-sided press reports have made difficult for us to do. Most of them quoted from an unpublished manuscript—without the permission of the author. The most sensational of them gave the impression that the magazine is tottering or riven with internal conflict, or even that it served as some sort of unwitting adjunct to the "Irangate" activities. They have suggested that the magazine has betrayed its glorious past, now the subject of so many studies and memoirs—a past, by the way, during which it was regularly reviled. These journalists, many of whom seem unfamiliar with *Partisan Review*, do not know that we follow neither a "right" nor "left" line, and that William Phillips continues to prefer a politically heterogeneous editorial board.

The editors of *Partisan Review* maintain healthy differences on

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this issue as on others. Some of us have argued that the content of the symposium remains pertinent and that it might still be printed; others hold that this particular symposium did not belong in the magazine to begin with; while the majority agree that it has now been thoroughly outstripped by the movement of historical events. It goes without saying that this magazine had not the slightest connection with the Iran affair.

Our internal discussions have abundantly demonstrated that the opinions of individual editors are not to be confused with implied editorial positions taken by the magazine. Signed articles, even signed editorials, represent the views of individuals. The future of the magazine does not depend on one symposium, or on inaccurate press accounts of unpublished manuscripts and behind-the-scenes controversies. As always, it will depend on the quality of the writing that we print.

Just fifty years ago, in 1937, *Partisan Review*, which initially had been close to the Communist Party, was reorganized as an independent journal of opinion, open to the best literary and political currents of the age. This was the theme of its opening editorial statement, which we here forcefully reaffirm. Now, as then, *Partisan Review* "will not be dislodged from its position by any political campaign against it." Now, as then, "conformity to a given social ideology or to a prescribed attitude or technique will not be asked of our writers. On the contrary, our pages will be open to any tendency which is relevant to literature in our time."

The Editors

March 11, 1987

P.S. William Phillips has been in the hospital with pneumonia since the beginning of January and was unable to participate in the drafting of this statement. Just before he got sick he was interviewed by Steven Marcus. The interview, which will appear in the next issue of *Partisan Review*, will clarify many of the assumptions behind our statement.

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Marina Tsvetaeva

YOUR DEATH (TO RILKE)

Every death, even the most out of the extraordinary, I mean yours, Rainer, inevitably falls in line with other deaths, between the last prior to it and the first after.

No one has ever stood at a graveside without the thought: "Whom did I stand by last? Whom will I stand by next?" In this way a certain link is established between *your* dead, your own *personal* dead, a bond which exists only in a given consciousness and is different in each one. Thus, in my consciousness you appeared before the Unknown between *A* and *B*; for someone else who lost you, between *C* and *D*, and so on. And the sum of our recognitions is your surroundings.

Now, as to the nature of this bond. In the worst case, most frequently, the link is superficial, local, ordinal, to say it all—quotidian, to put it more *all-ly*—cemeterial, dependent upon the location of numbers and graves. A meaningless link and thus not a bond.

An example. In life there was no link between *X* and *Y*. Neither is there in death, unless you count death itself, in which case—life too is a bond. Too little to establish their kinship. That sort of grave falls out of our sepulchral line, the line closes to two graves that have meaning for us. By this process of selection the line of our deaths and our death is created. When I speak of a bond, I have in mind only these deaths, which compose our own death.

Each death returns us into every other death. Each of the dead returns to us all who went before him, and returns us—to them. If others were not to die, we would sooner or later forget those who died before. Thus, from grave to grave—a round-robin warrant of our faithfulness to the dead. A sort of posthumous coexistence in the memory: in the line of one's own graves. For all of our dead, whether they lie in Novodeviche cemetery in Moscow, or in Tunis, or somewhere else, for us, for each of us, they lie in one cemetery—inside us—with time, they all lie in one fraternal grave. Ours. Many in one, and one buried in many. There, where your first grave and your last meet—on your own gravestone—the line closes to a circle. Not only the earth (life), but death too, is round.

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Through the kiss of our lips, kissed hands become kin, and touch each other. Through their kissed hands, the lips that kiss become kins and reach for each other. A round-robin of immortality.

Thus, Rainer, you have bound me to all who've lost you, as I in return have bound you to all those I've lost, and closest of all to two.

As on waves, death carries us on hills of graves—to Life.

* * *

Rainer, your death has split in my life, stratified into three. One death prepared yours in me, the other concluded it. One is a fore-tone, the other an after-tone. Stepping back a bit in time—a tritone. Your death, Rainer, and I am already speaking from the future—was given to me as a triunity.

* * *

MADEMOISELLE JEANNE ROBERT

"Well, Alya, how did it go at Mademoiselle's?"

"Wonderful, Mama! But the most wonderful thing was that we came, because if we hadn't there would have been only two of the children, two girls—one grownup and the other one a kindergartener. And she would have gotten everything ready for nothing. And you know—I was so surprised—she has a wonderful apartment: a marble staircase, carpeted, and polished banisters, and some sort of bronze bells. . . . It's even fun to walk up a staircase like that, though not for her I guess, since it's on the seventh floor, French style, and she's about seventy.

"Inside it's wonderful: paintings, mirrors, and souvenirs on the mantelpiece and everywhere—all kinds of them, embroidered, knitted, all with inscriptions from her pupils. And books, Mama! Whole walls of them. Mostly about Roland, the Quatre fils d'Aymon—that kind of stuff. But the most wonderful thing is that she has two grand pianos in one room. It's just because she's so poor that it's wonderful. If it was a rich man's house, well then, it would make sense. Just a lot of everything: napkins, knives. . . . So he up and bought himself two pianos at once, and will buy two more. But at Mademoiselle's it doesn't make any sense. And it's completely clear—from love. (Mama, I just had a strange thought: what if she grows into a giant at night and plays on both of them with no trouble at all? All alone, both of them at the same time—with four hands?)

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"And it's terribly cold. Two fireplaces were going, but it was just like outside."

"Tell everything in order. From the very beginning when you arrived."

"As soon as we arrived Lelik and I were given a huge old book on Paris to look at. Then the bell started ringing and different former students started showing up in fur coats, from seventeen to forty years old. And a few mothers. Mademoiselle looked all worried, and kept running to the kitchen with cups, and I helped her a little. Oh, and Mama, how wonderful that I didn't exchange that box after all—remember, you said: the candies are important, and not the box. No Mama, the box *was* important—for Christmas. Candy in a box—is a present, just candy—is just candy. And the box will always be there—for letters, ribbons, or anything. She was so pleased and wanted to pass them around, but I convinced her to save them for her trip, because tomorrow she's going to the country to her sisters. Lelik brought her apples and oranges, and he tried unsuccessfully to buy her hard candies at the store. He said that ten francs worth would have been a whole lot. But his mother wouldn't let him. She passed out the oranges and kept the apples—probably for her sisters. So she'll go with gifts.

"Mama, she's probably very poor, more than we thought, probably everything goes for the apartment and her sisters—because the only refreshments were petit-beurres. And a choice of cocoa or tea. Some young cousin of hers, also in a fur coat, helped her. But she was wearing her eternal black dress, with the same velvet collar and the little brooch with Joan of Arc on it—the silver one, remember? She probably thinks, like you do, that it isn't right for the hostess to be dressed up since it's *her* home, but maybe she doesn't have anything else to wear, I, at least, haven't ever seen her in anything but that black dress. . . ."

"So then what happened?"

"Then some fat creature I took for a little girl joined us, but the little girl turned out to have on powder and lipstick, and so I didn't know what to think. Anyway, we decided to entertain it (the creature) with a game of Truth, and did such a good job that it disappeared after five minutes, probably because the little girl—the kindergartener—called her a boule de graisse, and then boule de viande—and of course we kept up with her. And then it got dark and Mademoiselle pointed out the Eiffel Tower, which was just as near or as far as from our windows. As it always looks from everywhere.

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"Mama, I was dreadfully hungry, but I restrained myself and only ate one petit-beurre. And Lelik ate one. And the little girl ate all the rest.

"Then we started to get ready to go home, but Mademoiselle wouldn't let us go for anything, because we hadn't danced yet. Lelik and I thought we were going to watch, but then it turned out that we were supposed to dance ourselves."

"What did you dance?"

"Just what they showed me. Mademoiselle dances well, very gracefully, though of course, old dances. When Lelik saw that we weren't dancing the Hungarian he started frowning and announced that he was dizzy. But she danced with him a bit anyway. She danced with everyone and got very tired. Oh yes! The most important thing. Over the sofa in the living room is a portrait of Mademoiselle—when she was young. She's lying on the grass reading a book, and there are apples near her. She's wearing a pink dress with ruffles—and is very pretty. And thin, too, only now it's from old age, and then it was from youth.—And her nose grew. Her sister painted it—not the crazy one, the other one—who's a bit touched and doesn't like the dust to be taken out of her room. She sweeps it under the rug and keeps it. But it's a wonderful painting."

"How was it when you left?"

"Oh, just fine. We kissed and I thanked her, and she thanked me. She was very pleased with your book, but I don't think she looked at the inscription—I think she thought it was just something for her to read. But then just think, tomorrow in the train she'll realize and be even more pleased. When we said goodbye I invited her to our Christmas tree again and she said that she would definitely come. What are we going to give her—gloves or stationery?"

* * *

Gloves or stationery? As bad luck would have it, as ever, there was no money for the once and forever!—for the last gift.

Or perhaps a notebook? There are quite inexpensive ones. Or maybe—one is so loathe to go out at the last pre-Christmas-tree moment—nothing? We just—invited her for the tree. Why should there be presents anyway? After all, you only give presents to children. . . .But the crudeness of the self-persuasion and the artificiality of the arguments made it clear—a present was necessary. Only what should it be: gloves or stationery?

The gloves, it turned out, had already been purchased by the

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little boy's mother: "They're warm and sturdy, because hers, poor thing, are all worn. After visiting her—in this cold—I just keep wanting to give her something warm. I hope she won't be offended." (Offended—by Russians! A beggar might as well have given her the gift.)

The presence of the gloves confirmed the stationery. "From five to six francs, no more than seven or eight, at the very most, ten. Something not too bright, for a middle-aged woman." ("Middle-aged," when she was just about to return to dust; "woman" when she was—Mlle Jeanne Robert!)

Tres distingué—parfaitement distingué—tout ce qu'il y a de plus distingué—on ne peut plus distingué. . . .

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The boxes stack up with a light cardboard crackling. One—is too loud; the next—too skimpy looking; the third—too boring; the fourth—expensive; the fifth—expensive; the sixth—expensive. And, as always, with the exclamation: "Ah, il y en a encore une que j'oublie"—the last one is the very thing. (As if testing the precision of our taste, a small temptation by the salesman. . . .)

Light blue. Rag. With little flowers in the same light blue on the cover, so simple they aren't trite. Without pinked edges, or those supposedly English rough edges. A lot. Reasonable.

"Rien de plus pratique et de plus distingue. Et pas cher du tout, Madame, quarante feuilles et quarante enveloppes. Un bon cas de profiter."

At home, still in the doorway: "Alya! We have a present for Mademoiselle."

* * *

A Mademoiselle Jeanne Robert pour notre Nöel russe—Ariane. It is not a store-bought box which lies under the Christmas tree next to the pink package d'Olegue (Lelik)—because it is no longer nameless. Soon—the tree, soon—Mademoiselle. She was in Russia once, but has she been to a Russian Christmas tree since that time (fifty years ago)? And the anxious finding of the Christmas tree—at the last minute in a flower shop near the station—we didn't manage to renew the invitation, and so she's coming, not for the tree, but for an ordinary Thursday lesson, the first after her (French) vacation. She's coming to teach and will come upon the tree. "And Lelik, don't say anything, it's better not to let on, just bring her—or say that we're having our lessons downstairs—because there's no

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heat upstairs." For the children, Mademoiselle coming for the tree eclipses the tree itself. (Just as for angels who wait to receive a righteous man who knows not what awaits him, heaven is eclipsed by his coming.)

"She should be here any minute. It's ten of? Oh, another whole ten minutes."

"She should be here now. What time is it? She's never late."

"Maybe she only got back today, and that's why she's a bit late? Are you absolutely sure (the children to each other) that the first lesson is today?" "She said the 5th." "But the 5th was yesterday, why didn't she come yesterday? She told me Thursday." "She told me the 5th. But today's Thursday and so she'll be coming any minute now."

Only her two gifts remained under the tree.

* * *

The days came and went, Mademoiselle didn't. At first this alarmed everyone, then we got used to—alarm. The nonarrival of Mademoiselle, and she didn't arrive time after time, gradually became the refrain of the day for all the inhabitants of the house, small and large. That is, it became a thing which gradually lost its content from one time to the next. (The independent life of a refrain, outside of its significance.) Just as at the beginning we were surprised at Mademoiselle's not coming, now we would have been just as surprised—had she come. Surprise simply shifted from the point of departure to the point of application. It was surprising *from over there*. (Thus, Rainer, just as we were surprised that such a man could live, now—that he could die.)

People aren't very attentive to verb forms—font du sort sans le savoir. From the personal first—second—third counted times that "Mademoiselle didn't come" to the chronic, "Mademoiselle doesn't come anymore," what a road and what work. Mademoiselle just took up residence in the absence into which she had (for us) accidentally fallen. There was not a lunch or dinner where one of the adults or children, between courses, with a tone of already sedimentary surprise, did not state—"Mademoiselle hasn't come." And immediately—as if that was all we'd been waiting for, in unison along the beaten track of echo: Maybe she's sick? But she would have written. Maybe her sister is sick? But she would have written in that case too. Maybe she's so alone that there's no one to help her write? But then there wouldn't be anyone to wait on her either. Maybe. . . .

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Ill somewhere, Mademoiselle festered.

They were all sober people—(the grandmother, aunt, uncle, the boy's mother, the girl's parents) people who had lived through a lot—some in Soviet Russia, some in the White Army, all in emigration, and most important of all—they were people with that wounded pride by which exiles can be recognized, people who had devoted their lives to their children, substituting their children's future (and what a future it would be!) for their own failed, overstrained present, people of time (the eternal lack of it) and for this reason—*in every way*—merciless with children's time, people who monitored children's time. And this time—thicker than water, a child's time—was passing, and the children, not without a bit of confusion—for they were good children—idled about, relatively speaking, of course—especially in the case of the girl who looked after her little brother and for whom lessons were a rest. Lessons were repeated and forgotten once again, books were laid out and again fitted onto shelves. Mademoiselle wasn't coming.

The house relaxed somehow, softened, no one—within the limits of the house—hurried to do anything. Put the milk out, because Mademoiselle will come. . . . Clear the table, because Mademoiselle will come. . . . You ought to wash your hair, but Mademoiselle will be here any minute. . . . Bring some coal up from the cellar, or else Mademoiselle will come and. . . .

The house was cold, only two rooms were heated—and Mademoiselle rearranged everything with her comings. If this is the classroom, then that is the dining room, and the sewing room is somewhere else and so on. But even this nomadic existence passed.

It gradually became clear that tiny unheard and unseen Mademoiselle (she used to come up the back stairs quietly and—often, "Has Mademoiselle been?" "Yes, she's already left.") was the backbone and mover of this big, complex coexistence of two families, of this willful—for it was, after all, Russian—household.

What did these people who had placed all their hopes in their children do? Six adults in all. Nothing at all. "We have to write to Mademoiselle." —At first assertively, then more and more questioningly, more knowing that it would never be done. More futilely. Hopelessly. Mademoiselle hadn't gone away, she'd gone astray. She hadn't gone astray, but vanished.

The first to say it, it seems, was the girl's mother—but as a riddle. It happened this way. The girl's mother was taking a knife out of the cabinet (one of two knives) and was standing with her back to

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the boy's aunt, who was clanking scissors on the big dining room table. Therefore the following question was addressed to her back.

"So no one's gone to see the French woman?"

"To see the French woman—it's far away!"

"It's not too far for her, but for *us*—too far? The malice in the aunt's tone was tempered by the triumph of the witticism.

"It's not too far for her, but for us it's too far," affirmed the girl's mother, freezing at the formulation.

"But still, we should, it's only right"—the aunt nagged, distressed by the failure of her wit and, in my view, insufficiently shocked by the unheard (in that form) coarseness of the response.

"But still, we should, it's only right."

"At some point, yes . . . " but these words were not heard since they were mumbled.

So it was actually the grandmother who said it first.

"Either she's very ill, or she's gone"—said the grandmother, with the quiet sadness of the old who are resigned to the whole thing, and know it inside out.

But "she's gone" still isn't quite "she . . . ". And so it was the little boy's mother who said it first after all, the evening of that same day, after French dinner, that is Russian supper.

"If we haven't heard from her by now, she's either very ill—or she's dead."

And—the house came to life.

The resonance of death, have you ever thought about it, Rainer? In a house where after a long, demanding, devastating illness, someone finally passes on. Now, it would seem—is the time for peace, and when, if not at that moment—peace. Nothing of the kind! It's only the beginning.

A house where someone is dying is quiet. A house where someone has died is loud. The former sleeps—a death potion poured into all its nooks and crannies. Death is in every crevice. It's the hole in every crack in the floor. The former is flooded with the potion of death—the latter sprinkled with the potion of life. When the phial filled with the potion of life is smashed to smithereens, in every sliver, though it may wound—there is life. There's no crying in the house of the dying, and should you cry—you'll hide. In a house where someone has died—sobs. The first sound—tears.

Lebenstrieb of death, Rainer, have you thought about it? Then, the feet were run ragged, now the hands are busy, but of the two—hands and feet—it's the *hands* that are quiet and the *feet* that

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are loud. And what is quieter than—two hands filled with water, for example? But their very fullness—how, with what, from whence? For it was today at five o'clock that he relinquished his needs, departed "from all grief, anger and need"—his prayer finally arrived! They'll answer me (not you, Rainer, others): him—no, his body—yes. Enough of that! Doesn't every survivor know deep down that the priest, the undertaker and the photographer—are only an excuse for our fingers which are itching to get to work, are our affirmation, our conventionalized "I exist"—our full consent to live. We don't cling to the dead, we cling to the undertaker! In our hurry to photograph the dead there is less the desire to preserve—than the desire to replace—the living features—with a photograph (the memory of the dead—is living torment)—or than there is the certainty of forgetting sooner or later. The photographic print—is our subscription to oblivion. To keep? To bury deep!

Delineating. Wooing. Move something, rearrange. With trifling snippets, cares, repair the old patterns of life. The barbarity of these cares. Almost like facing *alles geschehen—nichts geschehen*. (And my words to you, Rainer, but differently. *Nichts kann dem geschehen, der geschah*. In Russian: it doesn't happen to the one who happened.)

The taming of the unknown. The domestication of death, as once—love. The usual inability to find the right tone. Our—till the hour of death—*awkwardness* in love.

. . . There is another, simpler explanation of this posthumous burst of paganism. Death inhabits the house of the dying, there is no death in the house of the dead. Death leaves the house before the body, before the doctor and even before the soul. Death is the first to leave the house. Hence the sigh of relief, despite grief. "Finally!" What? Not the person himself, who was loved—but death. Whence the celebration of its departure: for simpler people, the funeral feast—gorging and drinking at wakes (he can't eat or drink—so we will eat and drink!); and for us who came later, the gorging and drinking is, I keep wanting to say, recollective—the telling and repeating of the smallest details—to the point of stupefaction—to muteness—to well-wornness. There— eating away, here— the talking away of the dead. The thunderousness of a house after death. That's what I'm talking about.

And the first genuine quiet (that endless midday July bumblebee buzzzz in the ears) sounds in the house only after the carrying-out. When there is no longer anything to carry on about. But visits to the cemetery do remain.

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And while we wander along the paths, we read the inscriptions, entrust the grave to the caretaker, and select our own future death, taking advantage of its absence. . . .

Thus do former owners, hearing that newcomers have moved into their country house, come and stand awhile, wander around and about. . . .

* * *

And so, the house awoke. Since it so obviously awoke, it became clear that it had been asleep: the house, along with the grandmother, the uncle, the aunt, the boy's mother, the father and mother of the little girl, the girl herself, the boy himself, all its inhabitants, had been sleeping as if spellbound for three weeks.

In the way the house came to life, it became clear: she was dead.

"Mama, I'll write to Mademoiselle now."

The Letter

Chère Mademoiselle,

C'est en vain que nous vous attendons depuis longtemps. Chaque lundi et mercredi, jeudi et samedi nous vous attendons et vous ne venez jamais. Mes leçons sont écrites et apprises, celles d'Olègue aussi. Avez-vous oublié notre invitation pour l'arbre de Nöel? Je crois que oui, parce que vous n'êtes pas venue chez nous l'avant-dernier jeudi quand nous avons notre fête. J'ai recu beaucoup de livres: Poèmes de Ronsard, Oeuvre de Marot, Faliaux, Le Roman du Renard, le Roman de la Rose, et surtout la Chanson de Roland. Deux cadeaux vous attendent, d'Olègue et de moi. Ecrivez-nous chère Mademoiselle, quand vous pourrez venir chez nous. Nous vous embrassons.

Ariane.

* * *

"That evening she was so tired, so exhausted. I kept wanting to say to her, 'Why did you do all this?' And those dances on top of it all. . . . Let us all go home, you sit down in the armchair near the fire, get warm and rest.' But she simply wouldn't let us go without the dances, the picture books, refreshments, dances—to complete the evening. And those ladies in the fur coats, dragging in bit by bit for who knows what reason, making her whole apartment cold—and it was so cold already. You can't imagine how cold it was. It's cold here, but the-e-re. I couldn't get warm all evening."

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The boy's mother and I climbed the "polished marble" slowly. The staircase slowly led us from landing to landing. At the very top in front of a big black door—we stopped. It was clear there was no further to go. There were two doors, the left-hand and the right. Mademoiselle lived behind the right one. In silence, we knocked. In silence, we knocked again. More silence. More knocking. Our knocks thinned out. They became few and the intervals further between. The knocks themselves remained on the surface of the door, not penetrating to the world on the other side, or, having penetrated, were swallowed up by what was behind the door, by all the behind-the-door emptiness (by that in-the-other-worldness). The door didn't answer. The door kept its silence.

"Let's go to the concierge—we could stand here for an hour—we can ask, perhaps she knows something"—not whispering (like anything out of the ordinary, it wakes people) but with that special half-voice used around sleeping people, and others.)

"Maybe we should knock on this door?"

The door on the left echoed and surrendered itself, revealing at first a kerosene lamp and then the middle-aged face of a woman.

"Excuse us Madame, but do you know anything about Mlle Jeanne Robert? We knocked, but no one answers. It seems there's no one home. Our children study with her."

"Come in, come in, I'm so glad to talk about her. We've been neighbors for twenty-eight years."

The lamp yielded, and, turning around itself, led the way. The lamp, whose duty was *es an den Tag bringen*. The old woman, and the two of us, followed.

"Please sit down. I don't quite understand, you say—your children?"

"Yes, our children study with her. We're foreigners. Our children study French and other subjects with her. We live in Bellevue."

"Oh, so that's it. Je sais qu'elle prenait toujours le petit tram de Meudon. She was going to you then? A lovely place—Bellevue—we go there every Sunday."

"That's right. And now it's been a month since we've heard anything from her. She was supposed to come to our Russian Christmas tree, because Russian Christmas is after yours, thirteen days difference. . . . We have gifts for her. . . . (as if trying to conjure and conquer the unknown with realities).

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"So you invited her to your Christmas tree? How kind of you."

"Yes, and she didn't come, and we've been expecting her now for the last two weeks. My daughter wrote to her (thoroughly disregarding the fact that the letter, written only that morning, could in no case, even the most alive, have expected to receive an answer by this time—so far away was this morning from now)—my daughter wrote to her and received no reply. What is wrong with her?"

"Mais elle est morte!—Et vous ne l'avez pas su?"

* * *

"The 23rd, l'avant-veille de Nöel. The evening before she ran all about, up and down, rien que son petit châle sur les épaules. "Mais vous allez prendre froid, Jeanne, voyons!" Et je lui tirais les manches sur les mains. She kept buying things. The next day she was supposed to go to her sisters."

"But the evening before, the 22nd, our children, and this lady, the mother of the little boy, visited her. Yes, yes, it was the 22nd. She invited all her pupils, she danced. . . ."

"I didn't know anything about that. When, what time was it?"

"About four, and they left around seven. She was very excited. She wouldn't let them go without dancing. The next day? I don't understand anything."

"Yes, the 23rd, in the morning. From a hernia—a malignant tumor. Well, she never wanted to wear a truss, because then she would have had to go to the doctor, and they—well, you understand me—she didn't want to. A long-standing hernia. You mean, coming here, you didn't know anything? Then please forgive me—de vous l'avoir annoncé si brutalement."

"Then it's been a month since she died?"

"A month, today in fact. You say that she danced? Perhaps that's what did it. Dances—with a hernia. And no bandage. . . ."

"But how did she die? Was anyone with her?"

"No one, she was completely alone. About three o'clock her cousin dropped by—she sometimes helped her dans son petit menage, and Jeanne had given her the key the night before—she knocked, no one answered, so she went in and she saw her. She was lying across the bed, completely dressed in her hat and gloves, obviously ready to go to a lesson—she still had one lesson to give before leaving—the last one. Cette pauvre Jeanne! Sixty-four years old—ce

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n'est pourtant pas vieux. Neighbors for twenty-eight years. On était amis, on se disait Jeanne, Suzanne. . . . And all these misfortunes! Perhaps you know? Her sister. . .''

''She has a nervous condition.''

''Yes and it happened suddenly, no one expected it. . . . And Jeanne had to . . . une fille si intelligente, si courageuse, to work not just for two, but for three, because the third sister is with the other, the sick one, in the country—c'est elle qui la garde—and what can you earn in the country, especially as an artist, because the third sister is an artist, a good artist. Cela a eté le grand coup de sa vie. Elle aurait pu se marier, etrê heureuse, mais. . . .

"But even so . . . on a eu de beaux jours ensemble! On faisait la fête. My husband and son-in-law are musicians, Jeanne was a musician too. Did you see the two grand pianos in her room? One was for her, the other for her students. She was actually a music teacher you know. And so they played music together. Jeanne—on piano, my husband—on the violin, my son-in-law—on the flute. By the way, do you have any friends who would like to study music? Just in case, I'll give you a card.

So and so
—Violin and flute—
Professeur à l'Opéra

* * *

Mlle Jeanne Robert, traveling to the Russian girl Alya, not asking whether to Villette or Bellevue. Mlle Jeanne Robert, knowing neither rain nor snow. Mlle Jeanne Robert, charging seven francs in 1926 as she did in 1925 for an hour lesson which lasted two, taking into account not the "fall of the franc," but the falling of the franc onto our—intelligence russe—heads. Mlle Jeanne Robert, hesitating to accept her monthly envelope containing money—"But don't you need it now?" and "Cela ne presse pas." Mlle Jeanne Robert, traveling not by train, but by street car, and not to Bellevue, but to Meudon, to save us, intelligence russe, 1.60 francs four times a week, Mlle Jeanne Robert, who at the sight of a cup of coffee and a piece of bread, would protest, "Oh, but why?" and would invariably drink the coffee, and, by the beggars' code of honor—leave the bread untouched, Mlle Jeanne Robert, singing

V siélé novom Vanka jyl . . .

—to the year-old son of an emigrant so that he wouldn't forget Russia, and coining the name Mur, from Amour, Mlle Jeanne

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Robert, who last year not only came to my Russian poetry reading, but was the first to come—

"Un moment j'ai cru entendre une marche. Etait-ce peut-être une poésie sur la guerre? On croyait entendre marcher les troupes, sonner les trompettes, galoper les chevaux . . . C'est que je suis musicienne, moi . . . C'etait beau, beau!"

Mlle Jeanne Robert, confusing a lesson date for the first time: one on Wednesday (the 5th), the other on the 6th (Thursday).

Mlle Jeanne Robert who didn't wait for her new gloves after all—

Rainer Maria Rilke, are you pleased with—Jeanne Robert?

* * *

And, addressing to you the words you once directed to another—

denn Dir liegt nichts an den Fragenden
sanften Gesichtes
siehst Du den Fragenden zu.

* * *

P.S. I happened to find out that the last book read by you was called *L'Ame et la Danse*.

That is, all the last Jeanne Robert.

* * *

VANYA

The Russian boy Vanya died. I first heard of him from his sister at the ocean this summer. I was sitting on the sand, playing with my year-and-a-half-old son. "I have a brother," my acquaintance suddenly said, "about as developed as your son. Papa, Mama, uncles, thank you, please. . . . "

"How old is he?"

"Thirteen."

"Mentally retarded?"

"Yes, and a very good boy, very kind. His name is Vanya."

"That's a good name, the most Russian, and the rarest, no one names children that nowadays," I said, limiting my judgement to the name.

The next I heard about Vanya was from a close friend who had just that evening dropped in with Vanya's sister to see Vanya's mother.

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"As I was going there I was a bit scared: how do you act with someone like that? Do you play? Strange, somehow it feels like a false position. But he reassured me immediately: as soon as he saw me—his face lit up and he smiled and said "Uncle, uncle!"'

"How big is he?"

"Big, normal size. And he isn't at all as unaware as I feared. The nanny started getting things ready for dinner. "Vanechka, set the table"—and he set it, only he mixed up the plates, put down small ones instead of the big ones. And the nanny says reproachfully, "What's wrong with you Vanechka? Why these plates, are you crazy or something?" —The nanny is wonderful, she's devoted her whole life to him. They live together, the mother, the nanny and Vanya. They live for him.

"I'm chatting with his mother about something and all of a sudden, 'Uncle, uncle!'—I look around: he had walked up ever so quietly from behind and was staring at me. And such a good, kind smile. I really understand how he could be a joy. There really is a light emanating from him."

A bit of time passed. And then one day, a rumor started circulating that Vanya was sick. Pneumonia.

The rumor moved in. It blew in from Meudon. The breeze traveled from the red brick house I vaguely knew to be Vanya's. It traveled in two directions—to his sister in Clamat, and to me in Bellevue. The illness settled in. Chained to his bed, Vanya traveled.

The days passed. The wind continued to blow from Meudon. Soon the illness of the unseen Vanya became usual, taken for granted, in the order of things—that destroy order.

"How is your brother doing?"

"Bad, the temperature won't go down, we give him camphor all the time. . . . "

I knew of camphor from the last minutes of my father's life and for me—it spelled death.

"Sit a little longer. . . . "

"I can't, I have to go to Mama, my brother's awful poorly."

I thought about the mother and the nanny, not with sympathy, a vicarious substitute, but with the unsubstitutive empathy of pain. But I thought of them only occasionally.

Absorbed in your death Rainer, that is, associating it with every other death I have endured in life thus far: the proud death of my mother, the highly moving death of my father, many other

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various deaths—associating or juxtaposing?—I of course was on my guard against Vanya's camphor.

Two rooms and a kitchen. A little bed. (Maybe it was big, but since he called him "Uncle," it had to be small.) The nanny's despair, regulated by daily cares and church-going. (What sort of despair was the mother's?) The horror of the fact that this is Meudon and not Moscow (in Moscow we would have . . .). The horror of the unauthorized, uncontrollable thought of a foreign cemetery. . . . We brought him to Meudon . . . if it hadn't been Meudon. . . . If we hadn't taken him to the store that day . . . if. . . .

"How's your brother doing?"

"He's gentle, so good, he lies in bed just like a little boy—it's touching. . . . "

The last thing I know of Vanya's life is that he ate caviar.

"I ate caviar today. They gave some to my brother, he didn't finish it and so I did. He didn't want to eat anything, and then suddenly took a fancy to caviar. . . . We were all so pleased. . . . "

Caviar reminded me of my mother's pre-death champagne—she didn't want anything, and then suddenly fancied champagne. Caviar too—spelled death.

"Will you be at such and such a place tomorrow?"

"Well, I don't know, if I don't stay with Mama. My brother's awful sickly, anything could happen. . . . "

About two days after the caviar one of the inhabitants of our house, coming in from outside:

"The G-kovsky boy died after all."

* * *

"Two rooms and a kitchen." The little bed isn't visible, nothing can be seen but backs. The funeral service goes on without light. I stand on the threshold between the foyer and the first room. The coffin seems to be a thousand miles away, unattainable.

The bell rings, more and more new people come to say farewell.

The priest exists, creating a void around himself. A priestly void, sacred. A circle of emptiness created by the inhuman. A traveling circle. There was room for no one—now—for everyone. The elasticity of the vessel, or the condensability of the contents? A refusal of the vital in the name of that surplus. Refusal of oneself and

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of everyone else in the name of that one alone. And room for everyone. Only refuse—and there will be plenty of everything.

"I would suggest you hire these singers (says—the priest)."

"But why not the ones who. . . . "

"It would be better to have these. . . . "

"What, do they sing better?"

There is an urgency in the inquiring voice which frightens me, I don't want to hear the answer.

"But I heard that these sing better. . . . "

"They sing well, yes (Here! Here it comes!) but . . . very dear, whereas the others. . . . "

In the half-darkness I kiss the mother and nanny who pass by.

"You came on foot? Are you tired? Sit down a bit. . . . "

Without tears, with kindness.

(Oh, the beautiful reticence of Russian grief!)

Why didn't I go up to him? A false shame, false fear of tears upon first sight of him. The fear of shame and the shame of that fear. I want everyone to leave, so that right there, standing over him, I could tell the two of them about you, Rainer, about everything I know through you. I know that at that moment, I, *remaining*, was for them, remaining behind, indispensable. That my place . . . was irreplaceable. And faint-heartedly, formally saying my farewell, I leave.

* * *

"Dearest Vanya!"

—the sound of something not heard, but disclosed, as once to my inner-mouth's inside "Grey-haired dawn" came Blok's "Grey-haired dawn"—

"Dearest Vanya!"

If you could see us all gathered here, the church overflowing, you would probably ask "What holiday is it?" And we would answer: "It's your holiday Vanya. We're celebrating you."

Yes, Vanya, it is in your honor that we've gathered here in this church today, this church in which you occupied the humblest place. Your place is the most important one today. I can see you now, right here, to the left in the corner—your habitual, modest place. I see you praying and crossing yourself, I see your bright face, and your smile. . . . You were a regular and faithful church-goer—I don't remember a single service at which you were not present. It's true you didn't always pray with the words of the prayer, you forgot them

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sometimes, but then you prayed with your own words, with only one word: Little Lord! Little Lord!

And how you loved this Little Lord, how you believed in Him.

When you became very ill you asked me to come. I was told that I was summoned to the house by your own wish. I'll never forget how, before you gave your confession, raising yourself just a bit, you signaled weakly with your hand for all present to leave the room. Only your near and dear were there—and what could your sins have been? But you knew that the secret of confession occurs alone with the priest, and in this your sensitive heart proved you to be a faithful son of the church.

You didn't say much to me, but after the absolution, with what happiness, with what light in your face you again raised your hand, this time calling your loved ones back into the room.

Dearest Vanya, if only you could see us all—surrounding your little coffin—from your heights, yes and you do see from those heights—seeing our tears, our grief, what would you say to us Vanya, would you want to return here again? No, Vanya, neither you, nor anyone who has beheld *that* beauty would ever wish to return to earth, and the only words you would speak would be words of gratitude. Gratitude to your parents who surrounded you with such love, and especially to your nanny—with whom you were one. Thank you, mournful old nanny.

.....

Pray for us.

* * *

The mother stood at the head of the bed and—or did I imagine it?—each time someone approached, she uncovered her son's face, pulled something up, which then fell back over him. Over and over again for each person. Why? Wouldn't it have been easier. . . .

It didn't matter what was easier, what mattered was that the mother was showing him to the world—to everyone, for the last time, to each person individually. After the "Look, you haven't seen him yet" of birth—the "Look, you won't see him again" of burial. Revealing, she concealed (the face in herself) revealing again, she again concealed—deeper and deeper—until she hid him away altogether, from everyone, under the coffin cover, until she hid him away—from the whole earth, in the earth, forever.

The mother was taking her son back into the womb.

In this gesture there was also a simple maternal bond.

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* * *

Something else. Not flesh, not stone, not wax, not metal—something else. From everything seen—the unseen. The face in front of me never existed. What is here doesn't exist. Is of some other substance.

The distinctive features: incomparableness and the impossibility of acclimation. Can't be torn away. Can't become accustomed. A purely external (and thus significant) impenetrability. Inseparability. Incorruptibility. You can't cut it with a knife, can't cleave it with an axe. The face of the deceased is not a mask, but elemental cast.

All ends have come together. A focus.

Once and forever.

Closest of all, of course, is wax, but still—wax doesn't come close.

What reply to the body that lies here? *Refusal.*

* * *

I look at the hand and I know—it can't be raised. How much life weighs we know—but this isn't life, it's death. The hand isn't filled with lead, but with death. The pure weight of death. All of death in every finger. One would have to raise all of death. That's why it can't be raised.

This—is with the eyes, while beneath the lips:

First of all: kisses won't get through. Not the lips (life) on the brow (death), but the brow (death) on the lips (life). Not, I warm—but he chills. Impenetrability? Heat-resistance. Heat-resistance? Cold-radiation. I shall stand here and warm, and he'll lie there and chill. Such cold doesn't exist in nature. Nor this density. Because this doesn't exist in nature at all. In another nature.

Heatable: metal, wax, stone, everything. Everything responds. Grows warm.

The brow—refuses.

* * *

Vanya G-v—I reinstate you back to life.

Firstly, the narrowness. Narrow cheek bones, narrow lips, narrow shoulders, narrow hands. Narrow and therefore—not crowded. Not crowded, therefore—joyous.

The lightness of the hair on the brow and, passing over the

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qualities existent in the nonexistent, the tender, stern adolescent face which at this moment I read backwards: into life.

* * *

That's all Rainer. What about *your* death?

On this I'll tell you (tell myself) that it never existed in my life, because, Rainer, in spite of Savoye, L'Auberge des Trois Rois, etc., you never existed in my life. There was: it will be, it has remained.—*Ob ich an die Savoye glaub? Ja, wie an Himmelreich, nicht minder, doch nicht anders.* You surely remember this.

I'll also tell you that not for one moment have I felt you to be dead—and myself alive. (Not for one moment have I felt you: momentarily.) If you are dead—I too am dead; if I am alive—you too are alive—isn't it all the same what we call it?

But I'll tell you one more thing, Rainer—not only did you not exist in my life—you didn't exist in life at all. Yes, Rainer, despite *you* and *life*: you—books, you—countries, despite you—the local emptiness at all points of the globe, despite your universal absence, half the map empty of you—you were never in life.

There was—and this is, from my lips, the greatest *titre de noblesse* (I'm not speaking to you but to everyone)—a specter, that is, the greatest indulgence the soul grants the eyes (our craving for the real). An enduring, uninterrupted, patient specter, who gave us, the living, life and blood. We wanted to see you—we did. We wanted your books—you wrote them. We wanted you—you were. He, I, another, all of us, the whole earth, our whole troubled time, to which you were indispensable. "In Rilke's time. . . ."

A clairvoyant? No. You yourself were spirit. We were the clairvoyants. If you had walked into my room a year ago, my heart would have stood as still as if you walked in now—more, really—now, less than a year ago, because that sort of entrance would be . . . more natural.

Three walls, ceiling and floor
Everything's ready
Now—Appear!

I wrote this to you last summer. Wasn't it really on everyone's behalf? We conjured you up on earth with our will, that is, with all the tragic lack of it, all our will-lessness, with all our prayers about *all* your will, we conjured you up on earth, and held you there—for a time.

You were the will and conscience of your time, despite Edison,

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Lenin, et al., *from* Edison, Lenin, et al.—its only leader. Not a responsible monarch, but a monarch of Responsibility. (Thus we [time] once gave ourselves over, with all our questions, to Goethe, made him—whether he wanted it or not—our response. We made you—our responsibility. That's why you both gave back: Goethe—light, you—blood.)

"Und Körper nur noch aus Galanterie, um das Unsichtbare nicht zu erschrecken"—was what you said about the last years (as it turned out—days) of your body. A sick *or* a healthy man's—whose words are these? Not a human's at all.

Remember your Malte, how everyone followed him along all the streets of Paris, almost loafing about, entreating not everything of him, but him, all of him. And so we followed you—for a time. Remember Malte, who transmitted his will through the wall to his neighbor, on whom he had never laid eyes. His neighbor hadn't asked either. But Mälte—heard that cry! "Wer is dein Nachster? Der dich am nothwendigsten braucht"—an exegesis of the neighbor, at a Protestant lesson on scripture, which has remained definitive for me.

We were all your neighbors.

With admissions, confessions, penitence, questions, aspirations, prostrations, affections, we loved you down—wore sores on your hands. All the blood flowed out through them.

Blood. The word has been spoken.

Your *Blutzersetzung* (decomposition of the blood)—which I didn't understand at first—how could it be: he was the first after the Old Testament to say *blood*, having said blood *in such a way*, simply *having told of blood*!—this isn't an article and I won't try and prove anything—it was *he* who died from this *Blutzersetzung* decomposition, the impoverishment of blood. What irony! Not irony at all, but my first, in the heat of the moment, lack of foresight.

He bled good blood for the salvation of our bad blood. Simply transfused his blood into ours.

Stop.

I know that the medical illness from which you died is treated by blood transfusions, that is, some next of kin who wishes to save the person, gives blood. Then the illness—ends. Your illness—began with the transfusion of blood—yours—into all of us. The world was sick, you were its next of kin. What will then save the transfuser!

Poetry doesn't have anything to do with it. "An unnecessary

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irritation, creating bad blood for nothing''—is what people say. The limit of this ''unnecessary'' and ''for nothing''—is the final spoiling of the blood, that is, death. Your death.

While I cannot forgive life for the humiliating approximateness of its dates—the 29th of December instead of the 31st, moreover, the eve of your beloved nineteen hundred and twenty-*seven*, I am grateful to it, life, for the precision of form and appellation . . .

Rainer Maria Rilke, and every doctor will confirm this, died from decomposition of the blood.

—Having transfused his own.—

* * *

And all the same, Rainer, despite the magnificence of your death, your right- and left-hand bedfellows in me are and will remain:

Mlle Jeanne Robert, teacher of the French language

and Vanya G-v, an aggrieved Russian boy and—sweeping aside the surnames and even their first letters—simply

Jeanne—(all of that France)
and
Vanya—(all Russia).

I chose neither the definitiveness of the names, nor the perfection of the proximity.

* * *

Rainer Maria Rilke, at rest on the cliff of Rarogne
above the Rhone—all alone—
rests in me, his loving Russian admirer,
between Jeanne and Vanya—Joan and John.

* * *

Bellevue, February 27, 1927.

Translated from the Russian by Jamey Gambrell

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Annie Cohen-Solal

THE YOUNG SARTRE

In this typical adolescent friendship, possessive and exclusive, who could have guessed, looking at the odd couple, Gaul and dandy, that it was Nizan, independent and sly, who had hurt Sartre? Who would have thought that Sartre, with his verbal ease and his mocking aggressiveness, experienced the pain of rejection? In a complete reversal of roles, Sartre pulls out all the stops, while Nizan buries himself in his books, deriving all the verbal aggressiveness, the laughter, the scorn, and the cynical power he formerly lacked, seduced by Sartre's new and provoking brutality. One is silent, the other one vociferous, one elegant, the other slovenly, one calm, the other violent, and so it will go until 1927. Nizan relishes Sartre's taking on the whole world, playing the role of the Grand Inquisitor. They take interminable walks through Paris. They encounter Rastignac in Montmartre, or Proust at the Rondpoint des Champs-Elysees, experiencing, as if they were characters in novels, the Quai d'Orsay, Sainte-Chapelle, the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne. "We would walk through Paris," Sartre recalled, "like two supermen taking advantage of their adolescence to perfect their myths and theories. At times, a third superman would join us, some friend or other: Nizan and I knew he didn't have a trace of the superman, but out of kindness we let him think he did. . . . Actually, we loved humanity. . . . Paradoxically, the notion of the superman had fostered in us the idea of equality. We hadn't yet become average men, I thought, like those vast crowds we, at times, joined. They remained inferior to us, but we were profoundly equal to each other, and to all the other supermen of the world, whom we did not know, and who did not know us, but who must have surely existed in the provinces, or somewhere. So we were members of a club of equals of which we knew only two members, ourselves. In a way, these ideas were the result of both a slightly Nietzschean aristocratism and the vaguely egalitarian notion of a society that did not exist."[1]

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1. "Matériaux autobiographiques." p. II.

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"Say, this is really fine; write it down in your notebook . . . if only to have a good laugh at it later." Amused and ceremonious, Sartre returns the little notebook in which, every day, his friend Frédet records citations and thoughts inspired by his readings, his discoveries, his passions. There, Montherlant, Proust, Háfiz coexist with Saint-John Perse, Giraudoux, the Hebrew alphabet, cuneiform characters, and hieroglyphs. In the euphoria of discovery and eclecticism, Sartre will become an avid devotee of this notebook, which he will read, reread, and copy, using it as a source for new ideas. With Frédet, a surgeon's son, who shares with him the cultural ease of the Paris bourgeoisie, Sartre seeks out the period's most avant-garde texts.[2]

This intense eclecticism, this absolute dilettantism continues until the day when Colonna d'Istria, their memorable professor of philosophy—"a cripple terribly shrunken and much smaller than I," according to Sartre—suggests the reading of *Time and Free Will* as background material for a dissertation on duration. Sartre will never become completely Bergsonian, and yet, during these years of intellectual gestation, Bergson will indisputably play a crucial, intense, revelatory role: "In Bergson, I immediately found a description of my own psychic life." After this discovery of an instrument far more powerful and useful than any he has yet encountered, Sartre will become a philosopher almost by necessity. He will attribute extreme omnipotence to what he calls philosophy, even though his definition of the term is strictly and exclusively personal, as he will later admit: "What I at that time called 'philosophy' was actually 'psychology'."[3] The reading of Bergson meant the discovery of a center: philosophy would become his supreme tool, and an ideal assistant allowing him simultaneous access to two privileged fields of interest: the psychic life of the budding writer, and the fictional world he was going to create. Secure in his possession of this magic key, Sartre began to prepare for his entrance examination to the Ecole Normale Supérieure.

M. Colonna d'Istria had good reason to be proud: of the twenty-eight candidates accepted by the ENS, half had passed through his hands in the *khâgne* of Louis-le-Grand. "I am delighted to

2. Interviews with René Frédet, March 23, and June 29, 1983.

3. Paul Arthur Schilpp, "Interview with Sartre," *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (La Salle, Ill., Open Court, 1982), pp. 5–51.

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have this opportunity to express my warmest congratulations to you," he writes to Nizan on August 28, 1924. "The results of the concours have pleased me enormously. . . . At the Ecole, you will belong to a group of new philosophers whom I will delight in following through all the success that awaits you."[4] As for success, he was absolutely certain his wishes would come true. What he could not know was that our two brilliant *khâgneux* would share their future laurels with several other philosophers in the same class, Raymond Aron and Daniel Lagache, both students at the Lycée Condorcet.

Their first contact with the Ecole Normale Supérieure was something of a shock: "The conditions of life at the Ecole violate the most elementary hygienic norms. The dormitory is practically never aired or swept. Dust grows under the beds, impregnates our clothes, saturates the air we breathe. Our morning ablutions take place in the most primitive conditions: Lucky are those who manage to keep a small wash bowl on their windowsill! Otherwise, one has to manage with a tiny faucet dripping into a filthy sink in the same closet where we brush our shoes and keep our brooms and garbage cans. The food is acceptable, but the service isn't: the plates and forks are poorly washed and caked with dark sediment—a marvelous vehicle for germs."[5] In 1924, this exclusive nursery, the object of years of work, is even dirtier and more dilapidated than Louis-le-Grand. The students hurriedly spoon their breakfast out of soup bowls, and drinks are available during meals only to those who have brought their own tumblers. Behind the iron gate at 45, Rue d'Ulm, there is a tall square building with endless hallways, ninety-degree angles that muffle all echoes, and a glassed-in inner court that fills up with roses every spring and in whose celebrated pool ancient goldfish dart beneath a jet of water. Within this enclosed bowl, young Normaliens, these disembodied minds, pure spirits, journey through the lengthy corridors every time they leave their living spaces for class. In 1924, the Ecole Normale Supérieure is one of the most prestigious institutions in the country, flag-bearer of a typically French tradition probably unique in all the world: that of the Great Schools. Due to the puritanical snobbism of intellectuals or perhaps the budgetary restrictions of the postwar period, all complaints of

4. Henriette Nizan's archives.

5. French National Archives.

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material hardship soon dim as the new system of studies, relationships, and readings, of networks, codes, and rituals is established, creating the friendships and enmities of the four next years.

"Tu es un conquistador!" "Dis plutôt un con qui t'adore!" [You're a contender! You mean, a tender cunt!] Disguised as Gustave Lanson—the principal of the Ecole Normale Supérieure—with white beard, pith helmet, and spats, Sartre was a hit during his very first months at the Ecole. "On Saturday, March 28, 1925, the Theater of the Folies Normaliennes presents the spectacular show: 'La Revue des Deux Mondes, ou le Désastre de Lanson'." The audience of parents, professors, and marriageable faculty daughters is most amused by these jokes, puns, raillery: everything is allowed to Normaliens.

Second Act: His eyes amorously glued on those of Daniel Lagache, who—with a French twist, a flowered blouse, and a long gypsy skirt—impersonates Dona Ferentes,[6] Sartre sings a song about "the streetwalkers in their boas,"[7] with all its double entendres. Together with Canguilhem and Lagache, they made the rounds of all the secondhand stores, from the Marais to Place Pigalle, to find costumes and exotic accessories. Everything is designed to poke fun at the new Normalien mania: the pursuit of careers in large international organizations like the League of Nations, a vogue that the scene, involving Lanson's seduction by Dona Ferentes, a wealthy, plump, alluring Brazilian, is supposed, gently and metaphorically, to mock. The music is professional, with Sartre at the piano—"The Schweitzers are born musicians!": Charles Schweitzer—the costumes are suggestive, the lines full of literary allusions and Gallic license. The families of the professors laugh softly; now and then, their daughters, in their Sunday best, delicately blush. Lagache, in drag and outrageous makeup, is at least three heads taller than the bearded Sartre, who is now flinching under the attack of the Brazilian bombshell. The seduction scene is about over when the door at the back of the room opens and their excellencies M. Edouard Herriot, the prime minister, M. Paul Painlevé, chairman of the Chamber, and François Albert, secretary of public education, enter and take seats in the front row. All three are former students

6. Allusion to the lines in Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes" (Beware of Greeks bringing gifts).

7. Allusion to Victor Hugo's collection of poems *Chansons des rues et des bois*.

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("archicubes," in Normalien), respectively the products of the classes of 1891, 1883; and 1898. With their three-piece suits and chain watches, these dignified members of the Coalition of the Left smilingly applaud the jokes of an unknown twenty-year-old Jean-Paul Sartre. What else can one say about this elitist complicity that, for the length of a social evening, brings together such different people, with opposing convictions, simply because of a ridiculous yet powerful tie, the address: 45 Rue d'Ulm?

On this occasion, Normalien spirit plays a crucial role for a man like Edouard Herriot, because today he is only a prime minister on a reprieve. Since the accession of the left to power, on May 24, the financial crisis and a number of managerial mistakes have accelerated the political decline that will result in Poincaré forcing him to resign, on April 10 of the following year. "What a surprise," Georges Canguilhem, kept repeating to himself in the wings while jotting down a short text to greet the illustrious guests. In a few minutes, he scribbled a few lines of verse, variations on the theme of "The Little Wooden Soldier," which charmed the professors, enchanted their daughters, and delighted Herriot—all in all, a great success. Then the desks were moved and drinks were poured. Only when Herriot climbed onto a table and started speaking did some begin to feel they had solved the mystery of his visit. Up there, surrounded by parents, professors, and actors, he sang a song he had sung the day of his graduation. But this song was not a gratuitous gesture, in the spirit of a young, irreverent Normalien. Rather, it expressed his desire—unconscious or deliberate—to reassert his ties with his alma mater, and maybe also gain its political support.[8]

During the following years, Sartre delighted in displaying his talents as actor, singer, and pianist. He had found a perfect way to put his inadequate height to good use, since all he needed was a beard and the Legion of Honor to become a perfect double of Gustave Lanson. In 1926, he even received the recognition of the press after appearing in a revue with a Proustian title: "A l'Ombre des jeunes billes en fleurs" (something like "In the Shade of Billiard Balls in Bloom"). The March 22d issue of *l'Oeuvre* read, "A student by the name of Sartre brilliantly essayed the role of M. Lanson," and featured a photo of the young actor. On the other hand, the Revue of 1927 went down in the school's annals as the nastiest, most

8. All the information concerning the student revues is drawn from a conversation with Georges Canguilhem.

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violent, most scandalous ever. Sartre was very likely involved in it. Rifts had appeared in the close-knit Normalien milieu, first of all on the issue of religion—between the "talas," and their non-Catholic and atheist counterparts, the "patalas"—and then politics. Socialists, communists, valoisians, there were enough groups to suit any taste. Sartre joined the patalas and the pacifists, a minority group essentially consisting of Alain's former students, all quite fervent when the subject turned to the army and World War I. Their vehemence reached extreme proportions in 1927 when they revolted against the Paul Boncour law, which proposed to "reorient the nation's intellectual resources toward the national defense." They drew up a petition for which they managed to collect fifty-four signatures representing nearly all the classes and disciplines of the school. Finally, they focused the entire Revue of 1927 on the Ecole's resistance to "militarization." That year, the main actors were Sartre, of course, and a few other known Alainiens: Canguilhem, Peron, Lebail, Lucot, and Broussaudier.

To the tune of *La Marseillaise*—scandal!—a student disguised as an army captain expresses his pride in a very particular form of bellicose cynicism: "Je suis entré dans la carrière/Quand le métier avait du bon/On pouvait espérer la guerre/Et gagner pas mal de galons . . ." [I joined the army. It offered several perks. You could always hope for war while earning a couple of stripes]. The point is driven home even harder to the tune of *Le Temps des cerises:* "Mais quand reviendra la guerre bénie/Lieut'nants, colonels, deputes, sénateurs/Seront Tous en fê-ê-te."[9] [But when we get back our lovely war, then, lieutenants, colonels, deputies, and senators will all be justly jubilant.] The first rehearsal is greeted by a few hisses, but the first public performance causes a real uproar: the hall is filled with violent protest against this band of "tyrannical blackguards who enjoy harassing people under the pretext of pacifism." Some students boo, others get up and leave. A real scandal. A few days later, the press gets hold of the matter and Gustave Herve, a journalist of *La Victoire*, pulls no punches in attacking these arrogant members of the French intellectual elite who besmirch the French flag and vilify the French army with impunity. Gustave Lanson lost his only son in World War I and has since lapsed into a depression that, it is rumored, has caused him to lose all interest in mundane matters.

9. Jean Bruhat, *Il n'est jamais trop tard* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1982); and interviews with Jean Bruhat, October 9, 1978 and April 14, 1980.

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But the scandal caused by the Revue of 1927 hits him directly: court of inquiry, disciplinary counsel, the students are blamed, the press is suspected, the reputation of the Ecole is threatened. The gentle mockeries of 1925 and 1926 have been replaced by an act of subversion. The traditional folklore of respectable Normaliens has exploded, without any tact, in this bomb, this gob of spit in the face of the principal. "Party propaganda and social hatred," notes the military report, which labels the perpetrators "RP," Revolutionary Party.

During his first years at the Ecole, Sartre was the fearsome instigator of all the revues, all the jokes, all the scandals.[10] On one occasion, he sent a letter to the police accusing a fellow student of having murdered a woman, the wife of a diplomat, whose body had recently been found in the neighborhood. Some time later, with the help of Maurice Larroutis, Jean Baillou, Louis Herland, and Nizan, he spread the news that the famous Charles Lindbergh had been named an honorary student at the ENS. The press is summoned, and the event is announced in all the papers. In no time, that part of the Rue d'Ulm that goes from the Rue Rataud to the Rue Claude-Bernard is jammed with journalists, photographers, spectators. "We asked Bérard, who looked a bit like Lindbergh, to climb out his window, slide down a lamppost onto the Rue Rataud, and come back to the school a quarter hour later, by cab. As soon as he arrived, we gave him a terrific ovation, grabbed him by the shoulders, and carried him around in triumph. The public followed us; an old gentleman kissed 'Lindbergh's' hands. Meanwhile, a piano and two violins struck up *La Marseillaise* and the public joined in. Little by little, the crowd dispersed and when Bérard left to get to one of his classes, the only people remaining were three policemen, who tailed him the rest of the morning.[11] An investigation is immediately started, the evening papers toss "a few barbs in the direction of Lanson," and the principal of the Ecole Normale resigns.

How directly was Sartre responsible for Lanson's departure and the damage to the school's image? Did Sartre really try to provoke Lanson as a personal challenge, from the moment he entered the Ecole, or did he merely follow a general movement, initiated by others? For Sartre, to attack Lanson was not merely to attack a

10. Interviews with Jean Baillou, June 9, 1982, and with Emile Delavenay, May 16, 1983. Also, testimony of René Frédet and Georges Lefranc.

11. *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 35.

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banal expression of authority; it meant casting into doubt the summit, the reference point, the very "patron of the French language," to use Charles Peguy's terms. Since the beginning of the century, Lanson had accumulated power, first as the author of a scholastic manual that revolutionized the methods, techniques, and subjects of all high school courses in French literature; then as the founder of an historical approach to literary research, and finally as an influential critic. He had addressed all sorts of audiences, from the most erudite to the most popular, mastering all forms of expression, from journalism to scholarship via biography and hermeneutics. Lanson had readers everywhere. Sartre's own professors had been formed by him; the books on French literature Sartre studied had been written by him. Lanson had abolished the teaching of rhetoric from all university and high school programs in favor of literary history. He had dealt the death blow to the tradition of subjective analysis. He had scrapped the authors of the seventeenth century, such as La Bruyere and Fenelon, in favor of those of the Enlightenment, such as Voltaire and Diderot. Indeed, what Sartre attacks, through Lanson, is that very tradition to which he will remain one of the most talented, as well as the most violently rebellious, heirs. Let's not forget this image of Sartre mocking Lanson in front of the prime minister: it is the Republic of Professors against the Republic of Letters, the old guard witnessing the jokes of the new generation. This image of a provoking, disrespectful, subversive Sartre recurs again and again, like a leitmotif, throughout his life. Nor should we forget that behind the pedagogical attributes Sartre ridiculed in his caricature of Lanson, Charles Schweitzer's haughty profile loomed.

But what truth was behind that clowning facade? What quest underlay the cruelty of that short, hirsute, clumsy man? What depths lay within that broad-backed swaggerer, who had developed formidable muscles in the school gym so he could box and wrestle, the most brutal and aggressive sports?[12] What else hid behind his reputation, his prestige, and a renown that others must have, perhaps secretly, envied him? Was it his mythic novel that people spoke of with shining eyes?[13] Was it that superb, strong voice of his, or his improvisational talents at the piano—which he taught in the music room—the combined talents of the born musician, actor,

12. Interview with Armand Bérard, April 16, 1983.

13. Interview with Jean Baillou, June 9, 1982.

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writer, scenarist, and instigator? Sartre had presence; his entrance into the dining hall was inevitably greeted by a resounding "Sartre!" followed, after a few seconds of suspense, by a new outburst: "et Nizan!" Conversely, this community of young men provided him with friends and a public, which made him happy. After two years of intense cramming and competition—first in *hypokhägne* and then in *khägne*—the Ecole Normale brought him a feeling of freedom, and euphoric lightness that might be sufficient explanation for everything that happened there.

During these years of uncertainty, in a country that is going to celebrate the anniversary of the Great War with a long roll of the drums, and where Poincaré is again hailed as the strong man, the man sent by Providence, Normaliens read and explore, trying to find, in the instability of the French government, footholds from which to build a political identity. The "Jean Jaurès circle" brings together socialist students, organizes meetings, discussions, and debates often with famous political personalities. The school's gate admits, one after the other, Léon Blum, Marcel Cachin, and Marc Sangnier—an ex-Polytechnicien who, by alphabetical chance, appeared next to Jean-Baptiste Sartre in the 1895 graduation photo. On November 25, 1924, the group of socialist students will attend a totally unexpected demonstration during the conveyance of Jaurès's ashes to the Panthéon: Herriot delivers the address and then introduces some Normaliens to several political figures, including Leon Blum. The mastermind behind all these events is Lucien Herr, the school librarian who, although he retires in June 1925, will leave a very strong mark on the members of the circle as both a socialist and a "Dreyfusard." Some of the socialist students of those times, such as Georges Lefranc or Raymond Aron, later support the Coalition of the Left, independently of their ties with the French Socialist Party. Later, at the National Assembly, Aron witnesses as a spectator the budgetary debates between Herriot and Poincaré throughout 1926. "Wild with joy" at the victory of the coalition, Aron enjoys demonstrating through the streets of Paris, particularly when it is against the students from the right-wing Action Francaise. Aron reads *L'Oeuvre, Le Quotidien, Le Temps*, papers that contribute to his political identity, and he dreams of an eventual Franco-German reconciliation.[14] As for Sartre, he shares neither the rebellious

14. Raymond Aron, *Le Spectateur engagé* and *Mémoires* (Paris: Julliard, 1981 and 1983).

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romanticism of Nizan nor the realistic reflections of Aron. Spontaneously anarchic, Sartre feels no interest either in institutional political parties or in parliamentary debates. He does not participate in demonstrations or read the papers, does not get all fired up by causes, and can lose no illusions, having none to start with. Among his pacifist friends, he finds a verbal violence and an ironic distance that well suit his character. He takes advantage of these four years at the Ecole Normale—which he will later remember as "four years of happiness"—by engaging in a long self-analytical exploration.

While, in 1926, Jean-Paul Sartre, disguised as Lanson, uses revues, songs, and pranks to get back at authority, active pedagogy, his grandfather's generation, the French army, and a few other private bêtes noires, and while, excited by his reading of Cocteau, the dadaists, and the surrealists, he starts inventing a higher form of esthetic violence, Paul Nizan leaves for a long trip: England, Egypt, Ethiopia, and, finally, Aden, where he finds work as a tutor in a French family. It will be a cathartic journey, a rupture: On his return, he is different. On Bastille Day, 1926, after an evening with his friends, Nizan writes to a girlfriend: "It was our national holiday: my friends have dragged me along through the streets—Sartre, Péron, Larroutis, Cattan, and I. But the era of this group is over. It was no longer five friends walking together but rather Sartre and Péron and Nizan, each being with the others only for lack of anything better to do. By midnight, Larroutis and Sartre were drunk, and so was Cattan. Péron and I did not find it funny. We left and went back home."[15] Nizan is twenty-one. Soon he will get married, have children, join the Communist Party, and, pursue his career as a journalist and a writer. But first, he violently repudiates the years spent at the Ecole Normale, the systems of an Ecole "presumed normal and so-called superior," its professors, its students, its premises. "If anyone wants to know why I remained there,it was out of laziness, uncertainty, and ignorance of any trade,and because the state fed me, housed me, lent me free books, and gave me an allowance of a hundred francs a month."[16]

In 1924, when they chose to stay together in the "hole" they shared with a few others, they were still Nitre and Sarzan. Just as they were still Nitre and Sarzan in the pranks they played on the rest

15. Henriette Nizan's archives.

16. *Aden Arabie*, p. 60.

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of the world and in their reading, which fused them into a superior impenetrable couple, or when, as an act of provocation, they pinned Mussolini's portrait on a wall of their room,[17] and even when, a little too high and and a little too merry, they provoked each other into a heated discussion, at La Baronne's—a rather banal café on the Rue Guy-Lussac, where they plotted most of their pranks by phone and which they cherished because it afforded them the luxury of answering, whenever questioned as to where they had been spending their time: "But where else, La Baronne!"

The Nitre-Sarzan cell will split without drama or hatred, but rather with the languor of a slow drifting apart, as often happens with certain couples, when silence builds up and each turns naturally toward his own interests and away from the other with both determination and fondness. Sartre developed other friendships and, during Nizan's trip to Aden, lived with Aron and Pierre Guille. With Aron, he shared the status of not being on a scholarship, four students in their class having been judged, given the financial resources of their families, as too well-off to receive the modest stipend of 100 francs a month that their classmates used as pocket money. Lecoeur, Bérard, and the other two received only free room and board. But, like the others, they also went "tapir chasing," a favorite sport of most Normaliens, looking for private tutees to help them make ends meet by teaching Latin, English, or literature. That's how Nizan ended up among royalists in a Vendée castle, and then in the family of a rich trader on their way to Aden. Guille "tapirized" a young Parisian, Albert Morel, and then proceeded to fall in love with the boy's mother. And when he brought Sartre along, he fell in love as well.

"The little man is playing possum again," Pierre Guille tells Raymond Aron. They have concocted a strategy to figure out what Sartre really thinks of their work. "One of Sartre's peculiarities," Raymond Aron remembers, "was that he could not stand any direct confrontation, so that, in order to know what he really thought of my papers, I had to ask Guille, who would then collect the information and convey it to me. . . . And yet, I don't think it would have bothered me," he adds, "if he had told me that an essay of mine was no good. Once he liked something I had written on Rousseau, another time he did not care for the way I had broached a question of

17. Interview with Georges Lefranc, May 26, 1982.

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psychology. He was perfectly right in both cases; still, I wish he had told me himself!" So, these sensitive young men develop a code whereby "the little man" is either "playing possum" or "in the mood for compliments," depending on whether his confidences to the third member are negative or positive. There is absolutely no constraint, however, in their philosophical exchanges, the interminable duels that Guille, a man of letters, often witnesses between his two philosopher friends. According to Aron, "He had a new theory every week, every month. . . . He would present it to me, and I would discuss it. He was the one who developed ideas, and I was the one who discussed them. On the other hand, if I never presented him with any theory it was simply because I had none. So, he would try an idea on me, and if it did not work, he would pass on to the next one. When he felt cornered he would get angry, as when I failed to appreciate his version of a Nietzschean opposition between the absurd inertia of things and consciousness, or being-for-itself. I just couldn't see how the shadow in front of us could be meaningless matter."[18]

Those years of lofty philosophical games fostered an extraordinary complicity and complementarity between Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron. Sartre was the mad inventor, daring in his eagerness to master, know, and conquer. Aron, much more methodical, rational, and prudent, explored the universe of philosophy with the extreme keenness of his scrupulous and attentive mind. Sartre was more involved in deciphering himself, Aron deciphering the world. Sartre was more rigid, more obscure, Aron was much suppler and more willing to compromise. Sartre was the master of peremptory assertions, Aron that of refined speculation. Where Sartre liked to construct impressive visions of the world, Aron developed stronger theoretical tools. Where Sartre expounded definitive projects, Aron remained vague, merely suggesting different readings, gentleness, and prudence. What went on between the two of them during the years in which they shared the same room, the same books, and the same courses was a real match, an endless philosophical ballet. Of course, they had their quarrels, their breakups, their insults, but when, toward the end of their lives, they unexpectedly met again on the steps of a large public building, and Aron, approaching a nearly blind Sartre, addressed him as "mon

18. Conversations with Raymond Aron, April 30, 1980 and March 9, 1983.

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petit camarade," the tenderness of their years at the Ecole, their philosophical intimacy, their friendly jousting, as well as their differences over Saint Anselmus' ontological argument—so harshly criticized by Aron in Léon Brunschvicg's class—and the notion of freedom in Kant, all these memories came flooding back into Aron's mind and erased the rest.

Behind Sartre-the-reveler, who likes parties and bawdy jokes, there is Sartre-the-worker, devouring some three hundred books a year, Plato, Schopenhauer, Kant and Spinoza, Chrétien de Troyes and Mallarmé, Nerval and Cervantes, Aristotle, Bergson, Shakespeare and Tolstoy, Maine de Biran, Erasmus and Giraudoux, Seneca, Lucretius, Saint Augustin, Casanova, Ramuz, Stendhal, and Cicero.[19] He was "a thousand Socrates," insatiable, productive, scandalous. In 1926 alone he wrote, in white heat, songs, poems, short stories, novels—including a mythological one about Ganymede and his sister Hebe, with an account of the Titans attacking Mount Olympus—and literary and philosophical essays. He even developed a "complicated theory about the role of the imagination in the artist," the prelude to a complete esthetics. And, finally, he discovered the concept of contingency.

To prepare for his exams, he studiously adopted a technique of textual assimilation popular at the time: he copied down everything. In his hurried scrawl, letters overlapped, mingling notes from his readings of Kant, Plato, Descartes, or thoughts on freedom. In 1928, he obtained certificates in Psychology and in the History of Philosophy, and the next year in General Philosophy, Logic, Ethics, and Sociology. He attended his courses without much enthusiasm, failed to recognize himself in Brunschvicg's tradition of idealist rationalism, found himself totally immune to positivist scientism, and continued the exploration of the author who had first attracted him to philosophy: Henri Bergson. He tried to find a third way for himself, somewhere between spiritualism and positivism, groping toward ideas on creativity and becoming, and he invented piecemeal a philosophy based on the notion of a totally secular freedom. Following the intuition of his own intellectual needs, he associated with great works just as, when a child, he had associated with great men. Finding his professors lacking in breadth, he addressed his

19. Archives of the Ecole Normale Supérieure.

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questions directly to Descartes, Kant, and Spinoza, borrowing from this one or that, gathering here and there the concepts and categories necessary to invent his own composite, but coherent, system of thought. "Nizan, Aron, and myself were most unfair to those poor people [the professors], who actually had the *feeling* for philosophy but simply lacked the tools." To counter those "elegant soft thoughts," the three place themselves "under the sign of Descartes" and of his "revolutionary thought," which "cuts and slashes," and suddenly no other philosopher seems to be as beneficial as this "explosive thinker."[20]

One day, asked by the magazine *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* to participate in a survey on "today's students," Sartre contributes a short, extremely dense text. "It is the paradox of the mind," he writes, "that man, whose business it is to create what's necessary to him, should be so unable to raise himself to the level of being, like those soothsayers who can predict the future of others but not their own. This is why I see sadness and boredom in the depths of man as well as nature. . . .We are as free as you want, but impotent. . . . Otherwise, the will to power, action, life, are all vain ideologies. . . . Everything is too weak; too mortal. Adventure is a decoy; I am referring to the belief in necessary connections that would really exist. The adventurer is a rational determinist who thinks he is free. . . . We are probably unhappier, but much nicer."[21] Sartre is only twenty-four, but, in this little text, one can detect the future themes of both *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*. Can one turn one's life into an esthetic creation? This is the choice of the adventurer, the only man who lives his life like a novel. Bergson helps Sartre anchor his philosophy in his own inner experience; Descartes ensures the rational dimension of this subjectivism; and Plato contributes its esthetic aspects. Sartre is creating his own system, a form of psychological realism: at once the conceptualization of his inner experience and the basis for his esthetic plan. For him, philosophy is a sort of preparation for psychology and fiction. In his reading of Karl Jaspers' *General Psychopathology*, in his visits to the patients of the Sainte-Anne Hospital—where he goes every Sun-

20. *The War Diaries*, trans. Quintin Hoare, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 85-6.

21. *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, November 1926.

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day morning with Nizan, Aron, and Lagache—and in his advanced studies, which he will prepare with Henri Delacroix, Sartre is mostly involved in the field of psychology. His essay "The Image in Psychological Life: Its Role and Nature" receives a grade of "very good." Nizan, already a follower of Spinoza, finds reassurance in communism, while for Sartre, philosophy will always be a convenient, privileged tool and a means of access to fiction. He borrows his instruments from the great philosophers, but without recognizing himself in any of them, unable to sympathize. He has no master, no mentor: "I want to be the man who knows the most about everything," Sartre exclaims to Daniel Lagache, who is dumbfounded by so much self-assurance and pride.[22] As philosopher, he studies human behavior, develops a passion for psychology and psychopathology, writes his first novel. The philosopher falls in love with new art forms, sees the latest Murnau and Griffith, writes an enthusiastic article, "An Apology for Cinema: Defense and Illustration of an International Art." "Cinema is the emblem of our era," it concludes. "Thus, those who were twenty in 1895 blame it for the inevitable gap between our way of thinking and theirs. They accuse it, as they once did Socrates, of corrupting the morals of youth. . . . But cinema speaks to every one. . . . This should please that government minister who used to look at his watch and say, 'At this very hour, throughout France, all our students are doing the same homework.' Now, at 10 p.m., in Saint-Denis, at the Barbès, on the Boulevards, at the Marivaux, at the Gaumont, people from every social background sit together in a dark room as if in the nave of a cathedral, craning their necks toward a screen that joins them in the same anguish or the same joy, depending on whether they see the crazy face of André Nox or Chaplin's grin. The people have abandoned themselves to this new art form."[23]

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22. I have drawn all the information concerning Sartre's personality during his years at the Ecole Normale and in preparation for it from my correspondence and conversations with René Aillet, letters of September 24, October 11, and November 1, 1982; Marcel Bouisset letter of April 7, 1983; Maurice Deixonne, letter of April 27, 1983; Etienne Fuzeiller, conversations, 1983; Henri Guillemin, letter of June 7, 1982; Vladimir Jankélévitch, letter of July 2, 1982; Olivier Lacombe, conversation of March 21, 1983; Robert Lucot, letter of April 3, 1983; André Monchoux, letter of March 23, 1983; Marcel Paquot, letter of March 23, 1983; Louis Robert, letter of March 25, 1983; Edouard Selzer, conversation of June 1, 1983; Pierre Vilar, conversation of June 2, 1982; Robert-Léon Wagner, conversation of April 28, 1980.

23. Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre's archives.

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David Lehman

MLA '86

Last December, the Modern Language Association of America held its annual convention at two midtown Manhattan hotels, the garishly futuristic Marriott Marquis and the rather more conventional Sheraton. An estimated 13,000 conventioneers, ranging from full professors and their spouses to job-seeking graduate students in English and foreign languages, convened for the annual ritual that ratifies their consent to academe's social contract. Sporting sensible shoes and tweed jackets with their green name tags prominently displayed, scholars, critics and dilettantes assembled to talk shop, attend symposia, reunite with old colleagues and former classmates, visit the book exhibits of university presses and trade publishers, and ponder the state of their profession between drinks at such smart New York hangouts as Sardi's and the Century Club.

Bemused ironists, of course, had themselves their annual field day. Literary journalists, feeling like spies, could concentrate on the higher ironies, shielded by professional detachment from any unsettling display of spite or resentment or envy, which have long marked the secret life of the academic community, and not merely on the part of those who are—as one speaker put it—on "the wrong side of the tenure track." The glee of such observers might have been tempered somewhat by the knowledge that they could have easily filed their reports on what happened without really needing to go. Readers of David Lodge's comic novel *Small World* have already been there; change a few particulars, and the column that *The Wall Street Journal* ran in 1983 about that year's convention could do double duty this time around. Yet the very predictability of the whole affair could itself prove quite pleasant, at least to anyone with an appetite for Kierkegaard's brand of irony. The MLA convention, which takes place in revolving cities on the same days between Christmas and New Year's every year, provides a rare example of Kierkegaard's concept of repetition and rotation. It's the constant that allows the spectator to dally over the variables in his own life—an event that so nearly duplicates itself from year to year that the time between occurrences seems suddenly to rush at you as from the wrong end of a telescope.

To get to the Sheraton, where the foreign language sessions took place, involves a nightmare of gridlock from the Marriott Mar-

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quis, the headquarters for English, so this reporter risked charges of being Anglo-centric by electing to stick to the Marriott. The place is extraordinary. It's ugly, but on a monumental scale, with all the right touches, from the forty-five-story atrium to the glass-walled elevators, which seem designed to counter the effects of claustrophobia with the thrill of acrophobia. A revolving clock hangs over the hotel's "main lobby," which, being on the building's sixth floor, demands those inverted commas. You get there by escalator, and indeed, the Marriott relies on the escalator much as the Beaubourg does.

It was on an escalator between sessions that I asked various interlocutors to help me decipher "clitoral hermeneutics," a phrase overheard on an earlier escalator. It is, apparently, easy enough to grasp the clitoral part of the equation, but the implications for hermeneutics (that is, the interpretation of texts) seem elusive. I was told that a synonym for this adventure in critical methodology is "ovarian hermeneutics"; it is, according to one informant (an affably non-doctrinaire veteran of graduate studies at Yale), championed by those feminists who want to "valorize" the clitoris rather then the vagina in "the binary opposition of sexual discourse." Other feminists, my helpful guide explained, deride the concept as "pseudo-phallicentric," since an emphasis on the clitoris might arouse old bugbears, such as the view of the clitoris as an inadequate penis. Now, what all this has to do with literary criticism or the teaching profession is your guess or mine. For any of it to seem pertinent, you need to credit the absurd notion that gender itself can amount to a formal dimension of a work of art. Certain professors, absurdists of the intellect, seem to find this easy enough to posit. Or so I gathered on the escalator.

With as many as forty sessions taking place simultaneously—more than seven hundred in all crammed between Saturday night and Tuesday afternoon—a Balkanization effect was inevitable as the rival tribes of literary analysis found themselves segregated in separate meeting rooms. In one room you could hear a discussion of college teaching and the venerable educational ideal of Matthew Arnold; in another, you could find out what's going on in Australian literature today or the latest in D.H. Lawrence studies or in semiotic approaches to children's literature. You had to keep choosing, to indicate your allegiances in advance. "Male Anxiety, Female Rage" conflicted with "Who Now Reads Oliver Goldsmith?" and both of them went up against "Postmodernism

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and Its Discontents'' as well as ''Onomastic Inventions in the Works of T. Coraghessan Boyle.'' Ironists took delight in the fact that ''the Marxist Literary Group'' held its ''cash bar'' reception at the Marriott's Odets Room—named after the author of ''Waiting for Lefty''—at the same time as the Division on Old English was having its do at the Empire Room. Elaine Scarry of the University of Pennsylvania got off a pretty good quip about the convention's overwhelming sense of simultaneity. In her paper, which discussed what she called ''the calisthenics of consent,'' she said that the MLA convention was ''a paradigm of the principle of exit.'' I'm not sure what the argument was, but her phrasemaking kept making me reach for my notebook.

Other presentations ranged from the edifying to the numbingly impenetrable. Clearly, the watchdogs against sexism in language remain vigilant. Witness a session on ''The American Critic as Person of Letters.'' The colon has long been obligatory in the titles seminarians give to their papers, but the double-edged parenthesis keeps gaining ground. Consider the desperate cleverness that gave rise to such allusive mouthfuls as ''Class(room) Consciousness: Tradition and the Production of Cultural Literacy.'' Or take ''S(e)izing Power: Gender, Representation, and Body Scale,'' where the parenthesis is evidently meant to make the point that fat is either beautiful or powerful or both.

More than a few speakers upstaged themselves with the titles they had chosen, which were printed ahead of time in the convention program. In a session on ''The Discourse of Homophobia,'' for example, Berkeley's Christopher Craft told the audience that he couldn't live up to his announced title—''Discharging Wilde: Seminal Writing and Prophylactic Reading''—so he was jettisoning it in favor of what he proceeded to read, which was, to paraphrase the speaker, a tour of our culture's ''anal itinerary.'' AIDS, said Craft, citing a bit of Berkeley grafitti, has become in the public mind an acronym for ''anally injected death syndrome.'' But to conclude that AIDS (or ''AIDS discourse'') amounts to a ''brutally homophobic fetish'' is to combine words craftily for the sake of a political point (in this case, an important one) that gets blurred in the process. AIDS has indeed provoked a lamentable new round of homophobia, but to call the disease (or the reaction to it) a fetish is to allow self-delighting language to get in the way of clear exposition. Perhaps that's the point—to stimulate the free flow of ideas without necessarily attaching oneself to any or all. If so, however, you might

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wonder why Craft ditched his original title, since he did get around to an ingenious discussion of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and what matter if his reading of Wilde's seminal play could or couldn't be said to be "prophylactic"?

Broadly, there can be two justifications for the separation of rhetoric from meaning. The first invokes poetic license, the motive for metaphor, and would claim for the critical act the properties of a creative work. Much of the phrasemaking that made its way into my notebook was governed, I suspect, by this consideration. A rather less benign explanation for the tendency was put forth, in simple and direct language, by Stephen Heath of Cambridge University at a frankly political session on "Literature and Propaganda." Heath mounted a defense of propaganda. After noting that it is considered "a bad thing," as opposed to literature, "its antonym," he commented that "it should be easy to reverse this hierarchy," since propaganda is fundamental to "political action." An appropriate response to this line of reasoning is to leave the room ("a paradigm of the principle of exit") but not before remarking the speaker's glib little camouflage act. The loaded word in his proposition is "hierarchy," and its usage implies that truth in the realm of art corresponds to repressive authoritarianism in the realm of the polity. Feel the sour taste of that in your mouth as you shut the door gently behind you.

A political subtext was only latently or ambiguously discernible in most of the sessions I attended. If it came to the fore at "Democracy and Empire," where *The New Criterion*'s Hilton Kramer squared off with the University of Wisconsin's Herbert Blau, it's because neither man has the habit of calling a spade an implement for deep digging. Blau blasted American "cultural imperialism," railing against "the hegemony of the media" with its "control of the means of communication and the signifying apparatus." To which Kramer astutely retorted that Blau based his own information on the very newspapers he derides. The lines were drawn cleanly, clearly, and with marked civility, given the irreconcilable nature of the espoused positions. Blau: "If half the people on earth hate us, [it's] for a good reason." Kramer: "There has never been an American empire, and there isn't an American empire today, in the sense that there's a Soviet empire." Blau was articulating what many MLA members seem to hold as an article of faith; Kramer's presence on the panel was thus by way of giving at least the illusion of equal time to the neoconservative position.

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Though he was the more embattled of the two at a subsequent question-and-answer session, Kramer declared himself pleased with the results. That "the neoconservative position should exercise such a fascination" for his auditors cheered him, he said, because "as Stalin once said of the Pope, we have so few divisions in your part of the world."

Milling about in the corridors, meanwhile, critics could be overheard wondering who put the *con* in *deconstruction* now that some distinguished exponents of that esoteric critical theory—such as J. Hillis Miller, the MLA's current president, and Jacques Derrida himself—have migrated from Yale to the University of California at Irvine. I detected a split in the ranks over the issue of religion; it seems that Jonathan Culler, with his impeccable credentials as a deconstructionist, has made "Down with the priests!" his battle cry against "the Fryes, Hartmans, Blooms, Booths, and Kenners—our most famous critics—who are in their different ways promoters of religion." What, I wondered, does this tribal warfare imply? Is deconstruction about to self-destruct? "Don't bet on it," a tenured friend of mine advised me. "If you want to make it in the criticism racket, you have to be a deconstructionist or a Marxist or a feminist. Otherwise you don't stand a chance. You're not taken seriously. You're on the fringe."

To while away an idle hour between sessions, some pals and I repaired to a Marriott coffee bar and set out to define deconstruction as a set of simple propositions. These are the six we came up with: *(1)*Henry Ford was right: history is bunk. *(2)*Humpty Dumpty was right: words mean whatever he wants them to mean. Thus, in Humpty's own example, "glory" can mean "a nice knock-down argument." *(3)*It follows that language, not knowledge, is power. "The question is," says Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things." "The question is," Humpty replies, "which is to be master—that's all." *(4)*In an indeterminate universe, "meaning" is a fascist. This one will take a bit of explaining, I'm afraid. The idea is that the words of a poem, a speech, a TV commercial—any discourse, in fact—constantly shift their meaning. Everything depends on interpretation, and no interpretation is more correct than any other. Thus, to insist that a given piece of discourse means something specific and decided is, in the jargon of the day, to "privilege" one meaning above all others. And that renders one guilty of a dictatorial urge. Fascism, in short. *(5)*The author is dead. Long live the text! *(6)*Plagiarism is hysteria. Again I'd better ex-

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plain. If the author's intentions don't count (and how could they, since he doesn't exist), the text enters the academic equivalent of the public domain. It belongs not to the writer, but to everyone, and so the logic that labels plagiarism a vice is called into question. This, too, may be cast in the terms of a political allegory. The author, controlling the means of literary production, is the fat-cat capitalist. Readers who rebel against his authority (a pun that clinches the case) are the heroic proletariat, appropriating the language factory.

My pals and I were, I must confess, pleased with this quicky attempt of ours to interpret deconstruction. Only at the MLA, we realized, could such a discussion occur—we had certainly caught the spirit of the place. We were gladdened, what's more, by the knowledge that few proponents of the stuff could risk calling us wrong (if, that is, they really do play by their own rules). For surely they must want and expect *their* discourse to be treated no differently from anyone else's? Then off in our separate ways we went, seeking either glory or a nice knock-down argument—or at least a real live author, come back from the dead, come back to tell us all.

There were, as there always are, poetry and fiction readings galore. I missed the session at which John Ashbery received the Commonwealth Award for Distinguished Service in Literature—in part because of a simultaneous commitment and in part because the announcement neglected to identify Ashbery by name. "This year's recipient is an American poet, who will accept the award in person," the invitation read, and somehow one didn't expect that it would be Ashbery who mounted the podium. Allen Ginsberg's reading, a day later, was by contrast properly publicized and allowed the lucky listener to rehearse all his ambivalences, his enthusiasms as well as his doubts, about Ginsberg the poet and Ginsberg the countercultural guru. The poet began by reading "Howl" with as much passion and conviction as though he'd written it last week and not thirty years ago. It was a powerful performance, and it dramatized, when set in the context of his more recent work, what a falling off there has been since "Howl" and "Kaddish"—and how Ginsberg goes astray when he shuns the emotional source of those poems in favor of political or mystical pronouncements: when his truth, if you like, gives way to propaganda.

But when Ginsberg proceeded to read the title poem of his latest volume, *White Shroud*, the listener realized that it would be foolish to write him off. In this poem, perhaps his best in over a decade, Ginsberg taps his truest poetic impulse, the impulse behind

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"Kaddish"; he communes with his dead mother, "older than I knew her before/ her life disappeared," and wakens from his reveries with the Romantic poet's affirmation, "glad of life." With a guitar accompanist, Ginsberg then sang his "Do the Meditation Rock"—"If you can't think straight/ & you don't know who to call/ it's never too late/ to do nothing at all"—which was both moving and funny, transcending its own capacity for self-parody. (Ginsberg jovially refers to himself in the poem as "an old fraud.") Finally, Ginsberg led "a community sing" of a William Blake poem. An overflow audience in a ballroom set for 700 people, some of whom had brought along their microcassette recorders, gave him a standing ovation. This listener felt, not for the first time, that one reason Ginsberg became and remains an American original is his willingness to look like a fool, to trust his instincts and take them to an extreme, without fear of ridicule or censure. His may be a calculated vulnerability; but it is affecting, and sometimes irresistible, nonetheless.

As the convention drew to its close, a professor of comparative literature confided to me that he makes the annual MLA pilgrimage "to hear English professors massacre the language and fail to communicate." The lavish book exhibits lured others. "I just spent my last $55 on books," enthused Georgia Tech's Anne Marie Oliver, whose passion is etymology. "I've been looking for ages for *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*." To those members of the profession who do its unglamorous but essential chores, the convention afforded a chance to air grievances and exchange ideas about tactics for survival. At one dignified meeting of part-time faculty, who increasingly shoulder the burden of teaching freshman composition courses, members of this "new academic proletariat" maintained a resolutely good-humored front amid horror stories about lack of office space, low wages, few perks, no job security, and little respect. Nancy Comley of Queens College in New York recalled a colleague who had to moonlight at two other colleges to make ends meet. One evening she had all her papers in order but couldn't remember in which borough her class was to meet.

In contrast to recent MLA conventions, where the sight of job seekers in tears was not uncommon, the mood of this year's candidates was almost ebullient. "The job market has suddenly become very active," said the MLA's Ann Hull, who directed the convention. She gave that as one of the reasons "this has been our biggest convention in twenty years." It's also a reason to curb, in the end,

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the impulse to make light of this annual ritual. True, the verbal windmills seem ever ready to exact their revenge on the quixotic soul who enters the lit crit biz. And yes, the proponents of trendy *isms* and *ologies* sound yet more outlandish from year to year—they would probably fiddle while textbooks burn, if it ever came to that (and their nihilistic writings could furnish a theoretical defense of the flames). But for all the flapdoodle, serious matters do get addressed at the MLA convention, if only in unostentatious corners, and the talk isn't all academic. It concerns jobs and salaries and prospects for promotion, it concerns the language, it concerns cultural fashions and literary values—not to mention the education of our young people, now and in the years ahead. In this world where all books are "texts" and all speech is "discourse," what's at stake is the future of American literacy.

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Paul Schwartz

RECENT PUBLIC TRENDS IN WEST GERMANY

Since last spring West German intellectuals have been debating the meaning of the Nazi period and its use as historical example within contemporary Germany. Conservative historians are now questioning the singularity of Hitler's crimes and comparing them to those of Stalin. This trend has been decried as an attempt to justify the Nazis or at least to qualify their misdeeds. While the flow of articles shows no signs of abating, the terms of the discussion in the broader public have already changed. There is a growing willingness to see the Nazi epoch as a chapter in history which has passed, to publicly declare an end to the need for any feelings of guilt. There is a feeling that a turning point in German history has been reached. This change is the background of the debate among the intellectuals.

Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor of West Germany, whose coalition has emerged victorious from the recent national elections, embodies the tendency of part of the German public to claim aloofness from the Nazi period. This inclination is not merely welcomed but promoted by the two German conservative parties, the Christian Democratic Union, which Kohl heads, and the Christian Social Union. Richard von Weizsäcker, the President of West Germany, in a speech on May 8, 1985 marking the fortieth anniversary of the capitulation of the German army, took another approach to the past. He cited a Jewish saying that called remembrance the secret of redemption. For his efforts, von Weizsäcker has come under attack by members of the two Union parties, who accuse him of impeding normality. As for the population as a whole, a poll published in April 1986 found that sixty-six percent of the population agreed with the statement, "Today, forty years after the end of the war, we should no longer talk so much about the Nazi past, but rather at last put an end to the discussion." Kohl's own formulation, "the mercy of the later birth," sums up the feeling of those who belong to the postwar generation and claim to feel little connection to and no guilt for the crimes of the Nazis.

One might think that a profession of distance from the Nazi period would be accompanied by a certain amount of objectivity

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towards it. Instead the assertion of distance is accompanied by an eagerness to minimize the significance of the period and the extent of the Nazis' misdeeds. Any guilt associated with the Nazis is seen as a burden which the West Germans must cast off if they are to have a normal identity like any other nation. In this view, a normal identity includes a citizenry willing to trust in the state, to enjoy national emblems, and to sacrifice for the good of the community. Minimizing the significance of the Nazis is a means of reaching these goals.

One way to minimize the significance of the Nazis is to compare as many other things to them as possible. Hence, in an interview granted to *Newsweek*, Kohl, following his ominous declaration that "I'm not a fool," declared that the Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev and the Nazi Minister Goebbels both understood "public relations." The Soviet Union loudly protested the statement, and Kohl himself compounded his woes by claiming that he had been misquoted. Once *Newsweek* produced a copy of the tape recording of the conversation which showed that the Chancellor was not misquoted, Kohl explained that he had not intended to offend Gorbachev. What is not to be overlooked is that Kohl qualified as public relations the work of the man who oversaw the censuring of nearly every word publicly written or spoken in the Third Reich; who prepared the public for the Holocaust not only with racist films and books but with the burning of synagogues; and who brought the German public into a frenzy of hate in 1943 in preparation for "total war."

Normally, public relations means the activities an organization undertakes to promote a good relationship with the public and not an incitement to mass murder and war. Kohl dilutes the crimes of the Nazis first by calling the work of Goebbels "public relations" and then by putting the activities of Gorbachev on the same plane. While Gorbachev did not become Soviet General Secretary as a result of an interest in human rights, comparing him to Hitler's propaganda minister is simplistic.

Loose comparisons with the Nazis, which have the effect of weakening the importance of their crimes, also can be the result of shabby domestic politics. An example of this tendency is a remark concerning the Greens, the leftist environmental party, made by Franz Josef Strauss, the head of the Christian Social Union. The Greens, Strauss has said, are "not one hair better than the Nazis were in their time." If the Greens are not better than the Nazis, it suggests that the Nazis were not worse than the Greens. Members of

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the Social Democratic Party are also capable of similar politics. They are not above claiming supposed parallels between actions of the Nazis and those of the two conservative parties.

Germans also gloss over their past by making Hitler and a small group of his henchmen responsible for all the immoral activities perpetrated by the Third Reich between 1933 and 1945. In this view, the German people can be numbered among the "victims" of Hitler. The most internationally visible attempt to gloss over the past in this fashion came with Kohl's visit to the cemetery in Bitburg with President Reagan. German victims of Hitler buried in this cemetery were soldiers of the army and of the SS. Kohl's glossing over of the past did not end with Bitburg. He has proposed construction of a central monument in Bonn to honor victims of World War II and Nazi despotism. The victims that this monument would honor include not only the Jews, gypsies and homosexuals who were murdered by the Nazis, but also fallen German soldiers and civilians who perished in bombing raids. One proposal for the monument: a large crown of thorns suspended in the air. After noting the bitter words exchanged in the German Parliament and the talk of an attempt to mix together victims and perpetrators, one commentator in the press made the suggestion that a tall cross be constructed on which nothing more would stand than the inscription "1933–1945." That such monuments are considered suitable is a sign of the extent to which six million victims of Nazism are either forgotten or considered unimportant.

Kohl is eager to free the German nation from responsibility for the Nazi period. Alfred Dregger, chairman of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union faction in the Parliament, has taken Kohl's interpretation one step further by emphasizing the foreign share of the blame for Hitler. For Dregger, the German nation "fell" into Hitler's hands after the humiliation caused by the Versailles Treaty and the weakening of the Weimar Republic by the reparation burden. Dregger thinks that we should revere anyone who "behaved personally honorably" during the Nazi period, no matter "what people he came from or what branch of the armed forces he belonged to." Defending our right to revere German soldiers, he cites the request by Churchill and Roosevelt in 1943 for the surrender of Germany and not of Hitler. This request forced German soldiers into a dilemma whereby "they defended Hitler with Germany and sacrificed Germany with Hitler." Notwithstanding Dregger's attempt to reinterpret history, the German

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nation had voted Hitler into office in 1933 and followed him obediently thereafter. It is hard to imagine how Churchill and Roosevelt might have called for the unconditional surrender of Hitler and left it at that.

In Dregger's glossing over of the past, Churchill and Roosevelt make the German nation into the hostage of Hitler. Hans Mommsen, writing in the *Merkur*, describes this sort of "Hitlerismus" as the "emergency lie." Since Hitler had obtained a monopoly of national identification, any renunciation of the Hitler cult at the time was open to interpretation as antinational. Furthermore, the moral burden of important conservative leadership groups is denied by the representation of complex domestic and foreign policy decisions "as simple derivatives of the omnipotent will of the national leader." This view of the past first gives all responsibility to Hitler and then, in Dregger's version, blames the Versailles Treaty for making Hitler possible, and Churchill and Roosevelt for confusing Germany with Hitler. But the responsibility of the German nation cannot be conjured away. From the millions who belonged to the Nazi party, to those in the civil service and other public institutions, to those in a variety of private organizations, there existed within Germany what Hannah Arendt called an "almost ubiquitous complicity" in the Nazi crimes.

As a complement to blaming everything that happened inside Germany on Hitler, another technique of dealing with the Nazi period now current in West Germany is to examine the regrettable or, better yet, culpable actions of non-Germans during this era. The discovery of Kurt Waldheim's activities as a Wehrmacht intelligence officer offered an excellent opportunity to employ this technique. It surely did not hurt that Germans and Austrians tend to be critical of one another anyway: Germans consider Austrians to be lazy inhabitants of a sleepy Alpine republic; Austrians find Germans overbearing. All the more reason to engage in a detailed exposition of the Austrian participation in the Third Reich. As the revelations about Waldheim accumulated, the *Schadenfreude*, or malicious joy, was scarcely to be missed in Germany.

Der Spiegel's cover devoted to "the Waldheim case" featured an enormous dark arm in a Nazi salute looming over the Alps. The accompanying headline was: "Austria's Quiet Fascism." The article in *Der Spiegel* improves on former Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky's comment that Waldheim built his entire life on a lie by terming Austria's relationship to its own Nazi past a similar lie. The

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magazine even noted that Kreisky himself had "garnished" his administration with a half-dozen former Nazis. Such was the tone of scorn that one would have thought that denazification in Germany had been a complete success.

Perhaps the cheapest shot at the Austrians was found in the magazine *Der Stern*, which devoted an article to Waldheim's campaign stop in Braunau, Adolf Hitler's birthplace. Observing that many of the people in the crowd who greeted Waldheim had "personally experienced" the "celebrated-notorious son of their city" Adolf Hitler, the magazine adds that these people did not understand why "their Kurti" should be besmirched only because he, like everyone else back then, had cooperated "a little bit." Making Waldheim's visit to the village where Hitler was born the focus of an article reveals much about the way Germans used the Waldheim affair. As a Swiss friend of mine summarized, "The Austrians only say, 'Anschluss, Anschluss, we are victims too,' and the Germans, 'Hitler wasn't German, you know'."

Austria was certainly more than an innocent victim of the Anschluss, or annexation, by Germany in 1938. Austro-fascism existed prior to and then apart from Nazism; Austria welcomed the Anschluss with jubilation in the streets of Vienna; and many Austrians made a career by serving the Third Reich. Quite a number of Austrians helped carry out the Final Solution. But the coverage of the Waldheim affair in West Germany reflects a pathetic, half-buried desire to make the whole Nazi saga into an Austrian invention foisted on the German nation.

At the end of an interview with a German magazine given during the Austrian election campaign last April, Waldheim advised that no one sitting in a glass house should throw stones. But apart from an eagerness to blame Austria for this gruesome chapter of their shared past, Germans do not want to throw stones. They want to put an end to the discussion. In intellectual circles in Germany, a parallel development has been the comparison of the crimes of Hitler with those of Stalin.

The intellectual furor started with an essay by the historian Ernst Nolte in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in June of 1986. Nolte was careful to make an admission of the singularity of the Nazi crimes in his article. He remarks that "despite all comparability," the Nazis' misdeeds were "qualitatively different" from the social destruction that the Bolsheviks undertook. Nolte goes on to argue, however, that one should not concentrate solely on the crimes of the

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Nazis, the more so since a connection with the crimes of the Soviets is probable. He draws attention to Hitler's awareness of "Asiatic" policies of mass murder and, in particular, to Hitler's knowledge of the Soviet use of a "rat cage," which Nolte claims is the same as the device that waited for Winston Smith in Room 101 at the end of George Orwell's *1984*. Nolte probably pursued this weak connection in an attempt to associate Hitler with the anticommunism of George Orwell.

Nolte goes on to pose a series of hypothetical questions. He asks, " . . . the following questions must appear as allowable, even unavoidable: did the Nazis, did Hitler perform an 'Asiatic' deed perhaps only to that end, because they regarded themselves and their kind as potential or actual victims of an 'Asiatic' deed? Was not the 'Archipel Gulag' prior (*ursprünglicher*) to Auschwitz? Was not the 'class murder' of the Bolsheviki the logical and effective precedent of the 'race murder' of the national socialists? Are Hitler's most secret actions not, thereby, to be explained in that he had *not* forgotten the 'rat cage'?" Nolte drops any hypothetical questions or semi-qualifications to state that the destruction of Jews during the Third Reich "was a reaction or a distorted copy, but not a first action or an original." Nolte finds the sole innovation of the Nazis to be their use of poison gas to kill large numbers of people.

In July, Jürgen Habermas published the first of two articles on this theme. Habermas, the most prominent contemporary German philosopher, took to task not only Nolte, but what he saw as a general apologetic tendency on the part of a number of historians in West Germany. The historian Andreas Hillgruber's discussion of the Allied battle for Germany, for example, shows a conscious identification with the Wehrmacht troops fighting on the Eastern front and makes no mention that their resistance allowed the death camps to remain in operation. Habermas considers these historians to have opted for "endowment of meaning" (*Sinnstiftung*) at the cost of their science: "The ideology planners want to provide a revival of the national consciousness; at the same time, they must also banish the picture of the traditional archenemy of the nation from the domain of NATO." Nolte's theory serves this purpose—the crimes of the Nazis lose their singularity in being made understandable as an answer to the Bolshevik menace. Auschwitz and the other death camps are reduced to a technical development—their use of gas chambers—and they can be explained by a foe who is still present.

Although critical of the work of the apologetic historians,

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Habermas welcomes the open discussion of this period of German history. Acknowledging that a "pluralism of readings" of history "mirrors the structure of an open society," he argues that this pluralism creates "the chance to make clear the ambivalence of individual identity-building traditions." The freedom that pluralism can bring is contrasted with a "closed history picture entirely decreed by governmental historians." Habermas proceeds to warn against a "German national monotone NATO philosophy." He states, "The sole patriotism that does not alienate us from the West is a constitutional patriotism. A binding to universal constitutional principles, anchored in conviction, could only first form itself, unfortunately, in the culture nation of the Germans after—and by means of—Auschwitz." Those individuals who wish to call the Germans to a conventional form of national identity will, according to Habermas, destroy the only real dependable basis of the German allegiance to the West—"constitutional patriotism."

There is nothing in itself wrong with a comparison of Nazi and Soviet behavior. The danger is not in historical comparisons, provided that they are intelligent. Yet this condition cannot be taken for granted, because all kinds of comparisons of all sorts of things are possible. Even when comparisons are apt, there is a danger in the measures for which they will provide a foundation. In fact, the communist menace as pretext surfaced quickly in postwar Germany. In America in the 1950s, the communist menace paved the way for Senator McCarthy's domestic activities. In West Germany during this time, the communist menace provided an opportunity for absolution—not only by giving Germans the chance to remit their sins by participation in the struggle against the Soviet Union and its Eastern bloc allies, but also by creating an emergency-like atmosphere in which denazification could be called off. Nolte breaks new ground for the 1980s by providing a pretext for those who want to end the discussion of the Nazi period. After all, he says, the destruction of Jews was just a reaction, not a first action.

Use of the communist menace as a pretext in Germany even predates the 1950s. Hitler himself was ready to justify all sorts of misdeeds, including his destruction of the Weimar republic, by the threat of communism. When Max Planck visited Hitler to plead on behalf of Jewish scientists, Hitler assured him that communists, not Jews, were the enemy. Nolte takes Hitler at his word and begins, at least to some extent, to accept his estimation of the threat to Germany at that time and what means were acceptable to combat it.

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There are no end to useful statements made by Hitler for those who wish to make him out to be little more than an ardent anti-communist. For that matter, shortly before he killed himself Hitler expressed regret that he had been so kind.

Nolte sees Hitler's "most secret actions" as a reaction to the communist menace of the day. He argues that it is important that the Gulag Archipelago was "prior" to Auschwitz. These ideas exhibit a strange sense of causality. His train of thought runs something like this: Lenin and Stalin committed mass murders; Hitler knew of this horror and therefore committed his own mass murders. There is a lot that one can say about this logic; at the least, one must point out that it seems to suggest that the murder of millions of Jews was either performed as a deterrent to Stalin or as the unintentional result of their somehow having been in the way.

Habermas's criticism of the apologetic tendency among some West German historians deserves high praise for its acuteness and civil courage. His advocacy of constitutional patriotism ties the debate among the historians to the broad discussion regarding national identity. If Kohl and other conservative politicians wish to minimize the significance of the Nazis in order to reestablish a traditional national consciousness, Habermas and others propose a patriotic allegiance to the Grundgesetz, the Basic Law of West Germany promulgated in 1949. This constitutional document irrevocably establishes: fundamental rights for every citizen; a social state based on the rule of law as the form of government; and a right of resistance against anyone who undertakes to abolish the order the Basic Law creates. The Basic Law marks a decisive, radical democratic improvement over any other previous German constitution.

Some observers, such as Hans-Jochen Vogel of the Social Democratic Party, worry that the constitution will be overburdened if it is called upon to achieve what a national feeling does for other people. But "constitutional patriotism" need not be a substitute for a national consciousness. Germans can be proud of the achievements of their Federal Republic, national soccer team, and young tennis stars. The most solid cornerstone for a national feeling, however, is the democratic order constructed by the Basic Laws.

The first article by Habermas brought forth a flood of commentary. Historians to whom he made reference claimed to have been misquoted or quoted out of context. In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Joachim Fest, a biographer of Hitler, contributed an article which would have been remarkable if only for its persistent whining

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tone. Nolte had reduced the singularity of the concentration camps to their technical innovation of the use of gas. Fest questioned the idea that the concentration camps were singular either because of their technical form or administrative nature. While the monstrous figure of the bureaucratic executioner should disturb us, can one really believe that "the genocide of Stalin was achieved in an essentially other, less administrative manner"? We have seen the photos of the small mountains of shoes, glasses, suitcases and other belongings left by the victims of the Nazi camps. Fest continues, "Still what justifies us to think that there was not the same in the death factories of the Stalin era?" Why has the world, and particularily the Germans, forgotten the victims of the Gulag and of Pol Pot?

Fest issues the usual disclaimer: "No foreign offense diminishes one's own and no murder can ever exculpate itself by reference to another." What he expects, rather, is that new reflections and insights will take "the talked-to-pieces, frequently still wholly ritually debated issue" and lead to a new, moral accessibility. His idea of new, moral accessibility is the insight that although Hitler's will to destroy was not predominantly inspired by the menace of destruction offered by the Russian Revolution, the reports that reached Munich from Russia in the spring of 1919, reports of deportation, murder and extermination of entire population groups, gave a "real background" to Hitler's "extermination complexes."

Whereas Nolte would make Hitler into an anticommunist reacting to mass murder with mass murder, Fest believes that too much attention is paid to the Nazis in comparison to other practictioners of genocide and argues that Hitler's "extermination complexes" were given support by the Bolshevik terror. Yet even if Fest's analysis allows some psychological insight into the workings of Hitler's mind, it is of less help in explaining why so many millions of people were willing to make his will to destroy a reality. As for Fest's resentment towards the exclusivity of the world's disdain for the Nazis, he seems to be complaining that the Nazis have gotten an unduly bad press in the hope that someone will provide a fairer rating for the mass murderers of our century. Whether such a rating is at all necessary bears asking.

Fest's point that there is, allegedly, no strong world consciousness of all the various genocides of the century was picked up by Christian Meier, the chairman of the "Association of Historians of Germany." Writing in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Meier felt

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compelled to offer what amounts to the professional historian's perspective. He observes how difficult it is to "orient" oneself to "the role of mass murder in history generally." For the benefit of Ph.D. candidates in search of a topic, he brightly notes, "Here lies an obvious research desiderata." After discussing various reasons why the Nazi past is always held up to the Germans, he concludes, "And then it is much better, to take it for once tactically, when we know and say how it is than when we always must let it be said to us." According to Meier, if research is to be done and reproaches made, it might as well be accomplished by Germans.

Reference to two other articles in the German press will give a sense of the variety of voices raised in this debate. In *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, a magazine associated with the Social Democratic Party, Jürgen Kocka decried the growing number of "Alltagshistoriker," or "everyday historians" of the Nazi period. The work of these writers takes the form of collections of oral histories or studies of particular regions or groups of individuals. Often the authors make no attempt to tie the individual experience to the broader issues of the period or the wisdom that the passage of time has granted. The result can be a banalization or even a distortion of history. As part of the trend of Nazi nostalgia, there is the development of "Adolph and Eva tourism" with, for example, Berchtesgaden, the site of Hitler's mountain retreat, drawing numbers of visitors. Although Sunday trips by the family to Hitler's home are not likely to improve the historical consciousness of the nation, everyday histories need not inevitably be exercises in nostalgia. Like archeologists, we can use evidence of the experience of institutions or regions or individuals to help us reconstruct the past. What we must do, however, is use these scattered bits of evidence with historical perspective. It is all well to take note of the determined resistance of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front and the terror of the civilians in those areas of the German Reich overrun by the Red Army. The death camps functioning in their midst are also worth mentioning.

In his article, Fest had expressed doubt as to the singularity of the administrative murder of the Nazis. Eberhard Jäckel, writing in *Die Zeit*, found a different ground on which to maintain that the Nazis were unique. He writes, "never before had a state with the authority of its responsible leader decided and announced the complete murder of a group of people, including the old, the women, the children and the babies, and translated into action, in point of fact, this decision with all possible governmental means of power." Jäckel

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distinguishes between the Soviet Communists' intention to exterminate the bourgeoisie as a class, which did not include the intention to kill every bourgeois, and the Nazis' intention to kill every single Jew. Whatever the abstract validity of this distinction, it would surely be of little comfort to a bourgeois slated for execution. Also, this differentiation suggests that the evil of the Nazis rests in their being more consistent and thorough-minded than the Soviets.

In the midst of this controversy, Habermas published a second piece in *Die Zeit*. Rather than debating the originality of Auschwitz, Habermas went to the heart of the matter: the "inner connection" between "our own life and the context of life that made Auschwitz possible." He explains, "Our form of life is bound with the form of life of our parents and grandparents through a difficult to unravel net of family, local, political and also intellectual traditions—hence, through a historical milieu which has made us into what and who we are today."

Habermas raises the issue of the consequences to be drawn from the existential connections of traditions and forms of life impoisoned by unspeakable crimes. A narcissistic question, he admits: how should the Germans place themselves in relation to their own heritage? "Can one continue the tradition of German culture without assuring the historical liability for the form of life in which Auschwitz was possible? His conclusion is that the German liability for these crimes can only be answered for "by the united memory of the irreparable and by a reflexive, scrutinizing attitude towards one's own founding tradition." Habermas argues that the public settling of liability by Nolte and Fest does not serve to enlighten and that the rationalization they offer will only hurt Germany. He states: "They affect the political morale of a community that—after a liberation by allied troops without any action on its own part—was established in the spirit of the Western understanding of freedom, responsibility and self-determination."

This essay by Habermas is the most important reflection on the "guilt question" for the post-war generation now inheriting power in West Germany. The "inner connection" that Habermas sees binding the Germans to their past is everywhere to be found. The German language itself bears the scars of the Nazi period. Certain terms, like *Saüberungsaktion* (cleansing operation, used to mean the extermination of humans); *ausrotten* (to root out, used to mean the extermination of a race of people); and *Endlösung* (final solution) are contaminated beyond cure. All too alive is the characteristic of Ger-

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mans to believe in and not question authority, a mentality described in the figure of *der Untertan* (a person submissive to authority). This cultural tendency of pliable obedience preceded the Nazis, but attained its poisonous flowering under their cultivation.

The desire to reduce the importance of the Nazi period, to stop the discussion, to end the guilt, is an insult to groups and nations who suffered at the hands of the Nazis. The tastelessness that this attempt to forget can reach is illustrated by Franz Josef Strauss's recent remark that the era of self-humiliation is over, that the Germans no longer want to be "permanent sojourners at the Wailing Wall." The desire to end the discussion is also an insult to the German nation. The meaning of twelve disastrous years is to be minimized so that the conservative parties can get back to business as usual. A public balancing of accounts, with Hitler's crimes toted up against Stalin's in some kind of cosmic calculation, is made as a public exorcism of responsibility.

In Wolfgang Borchert's play *Outside Before the Door* (1946), a German soldier returns in shock and rags from the Eastern front. The war is long past, everyone tells him, but the soldier, Beckmann, wants to know who is responsible for all the murder and misery he has witnessed. He says, "Responsibility is not only a word, a chemical formula, by which bright human flesh is transformed into dark earth. . . . The dead—don't answer. God—doesn't answer. But the living, they ask." It has taken forty years, but Beckmann has his answer, one offered with a straight face for public consumption—it was the fault of the Versailles Treaty, it was the fault of Churchill and Roosevelt, it was the fault of Stalin.

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FICTION

Michel Tournier

BLANDINE, or THE FATHER'S VISIT

"We bachelors are not only vulnerable, we're under attack!"

Alexis had said this peremptorily; for a long time he had been silent, listening to his friends' sorrows and grievances. Then he had turned his back on us and squatted down to tend the fire in the hearth. Tongs in one hand and poker in the other, he worked to restore a structure of logs and burning coals that would lure, hold, and feed the flame.

It was not really a club for old bachelors, though it is true that the four guests assembled at Alexis's place usually met once a month, in one or the other of their homes. None of them had been married, with the exception of Hébert, who was now divorced, and a loner like the rest of us.

Alexis got to his feet and faced us again, leaning on the mantelpiece.

"You moan about the tax-collector taking a sadistic pleasure in ruining bachelors. But what about the way we get moved around? In big business they always assume that a single man, because he has no wife or children to drag around, can be transferred, moved any which way, to the provinces or the ends of the earth. He travels light, and can be moved more economically than a married man. No doubt this is fair enough for the company employing him, but for the man involved it's a catastrophe. The fact is, a family man is attached to and carries with him a minimum human community. His wife and children make up a small society, which for better or for worse goes with him in his travels. The bachelor has his human network too: his relatives, his friends, his favorite haunts, perhaps a club or a *salon*. None of this can be transported. If he is uprooted he suffers from the deepest and most complete form of loneliness. It will take

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him years to recultivate this human nutrient, and without it he is rootless, alienated and socially deprived.

"Yes, we certainly are vulnerable and under attack," he repeated, "and I have just had this brought home to me in a very strange way."

He paused for a moment to make sure he had our full attention. . . .

This house is, as you know, close to the church and the village primary school. Not only is there the charm of the bells ringing out, but also the refreshing sound of the far-off shouts and squeals that come from the playground. My house is open to everyone. That's another feature of a bachelor's life. It is the woman who bars the door of a house. She is the guardian of the home, an often jealous guardian, sometimes overly intent on creating a vacuum around her husband. We all know that for every two friends who marry we lose one. Madame wants to keep him for herself, and she resents the element of complicity inherent in any of her husband's relationships dating from before their marriage.

But my door is always open. Four times a day, little groups of chirruping schoolboys and schoolgirls pass by the wide-open garden gates. Often, when the weather is fine, they venture in. There are various trees with walnuts, apples, cherries, medlars. In spring, if they look closely enough along the bottom of the walls, they will find wild strawberries. Their curiosity is also aroused by this funny work I do as a photographer. How can anyone earn a living like that? It might be different if I had a shop and sold film and cameras, or if I could be seen working at christenings and weddings and hunters' meets! But no, I'm a "reporter." When it comes down to it, they don't really know what I do. So you see, this obscure occupation, these open doors, the fact that there is no woman about the place; it all provokes the contempt of sober-minded people and the curiosity of children. They risk an expedition. They discover me and we get to know each other. They rapidly investigate the house, and are pleased at the supplies of ice-cream in the freezer. It's something I replenish at the same time as I do the birds' and the cat's bowls, and with similar feelings.

Please bear in mind that these forays are almost always made by little boys, even though the school is mixed. Little girls, who are more timid—or sure to be chastised—are not so willing to step into a stranger's house. And it is remarkable that for all the so-called "per-

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missive'' talk, customs have remained, at least in this respect, deeply traditional. I wish some sociologists would do a survey of cities on public holidays, and count how many boys and how many girls are freely roaming the streets. I bet they would find ten boys for every girl.

I was telling a friend about my young visitors, and the scarcity of little girls. ''That's lucky, you know!'' he exclaimed. ''Watch yourself with little girls! Mustn't touch, hands off! Whatever they may say in would-be liberated circles . . . you can do what you like with boys. Little girls! They're traps for fools. They're trouble-makers, little beasts.''

Knowing his ingrained pessimism and his hatred of women, I was only half convinced. I was to think of him again that day last summer when I first met Blandine.

I had taken out my 4 x 5 with all its accessories—tripod and platform, frames, light-meter, range-finder, even an electronic flash to intensify light and shade in a full-sun shot. I wanted to photograph a couple of big bumblebees which were impishly buzzing around the tips of a lavender clump. It was the sort of photo that might interest a glossy semi-scientific magazine that pays well but it needed the utmost patience, because naturally I could not expect the least cooperation from my two little insects. No sooner would I get one of them in my sights and set the focus, than the bumble bee would decide to swap flowers before I could take the shot. I was concentrating, tensed, almost at the end of my tether, when an enormous intruder burst in, virtually between my legs, upsetting my tripod, and knocking over my box of frames. It was a huge Briard sheepdog, shaggy, black and boisterous, which without further ceremony lifted its hind leg over my lavender before getting tangled up in the cord of my flash.

At that moment there was the sound of shouting and I heard light voices and laughter and I saw two little girls come rushing in as well. I have completely forgotten one of them who must have been colorless, or transparent, or perhaps invisible, because I had eyes only for the other, she was so pretty and so delicate. The shiny black aprons trimmed with red braid that schoolchildren used to wear have disappeared now and I miss them. There is nothing that does more to highlight the freshness and sweetness of a child than dark and sober clothing. Blandine was wearing a light-blue smock, very short, gathered over her golden thighs by a floral belt. She burst out laughing when she saw her dog frolicking around in my equipment,

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and I immediately thought of one of Botticelli's angel-musicians. She threw herself after the dog, and succeeded in grasping his collar, but he was heavier than she was, and sent her rolling into the grass. I drank in this delicious sight, wondering whatever had possessed me to photograph bumblebees.

We introduced ourselves. She lived with her parents, her two older brothers and her little sister, on a small out-of-the-way farm, a kilometer from the village.

"But we're going to move soon," she said. Her father worked in an electrical goods factory some distance away. He left early and came home late. When the holidays came they didn't go anywhere because they lived in the country.

I invited them in to show them my laboratory and some of my work.

"You must come back, and I will take your pictures," I promised disingenuously. "But next time, don't bring the dog."

We had left him outside, and frantic with loneliness he was making an almighty racket trying to get in.

We said goodbye. They ran off laughing, with the Briard bounding along behind and I was alone, dazzled and a little bit sad, with my 4 x 5 and my lavender, which the bumble bees had entirely abandoned. What could be sadder than a photographer with nothing left to photograph, who has let escape the only image that will from now on have any value in his eyes?

Blandine came back. She was alone, without her friend, and in my blindness I didn't even think to be surprised. I took a series of portraits of her which are unquestionably my most successful work in twenty-five years of photography. I was anxious for a moment when I offered her a set for her parents and she refused.

"Oh no, they wouldn't be interested!"

I didn't even have the courage to ask if they knew about her visits to my place.

One day it was raining and she came in, shaking out her blonde hair, which was pearled with raindrops. She hung up her raincoat; it crackled, limpid and light as a dragonfly's wing, and she headed straight for the kitchen. I lit a fire in the hearth. She made a cup of tea and some slices of toast. *Tea for two*. It was gorgeous, dazzling, idyllic. I couldn't help thinking of Lewis Carroll, that clergyman-photographer of a century ago, who used to organize parties at his home reserved exclusively for little girls under twelve. He would put make-up on them, dress them up, arrange them in groups or in *tableaux vivants*, and fix forever on film their transient, fragile,

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and delicious immaturity. I'm sure I actually heard him, in his own voice, murmur in a tone of offended modesty, this answer to a friend who had asked him if all these young girls didn't sometimes exasperate him:

"Be quiet! They are three quarters of my life!" And out of timidity he was lying about the fourth part which undoubtedly also belonged to his little girls.

How old would Blandine have been? Eleven, perhaps, or twelve at the most. But I knew instinctively that puberty had not yet made her bleed. I could see it in a hundred unmistakable details: a kind of unself-conscious candor in her movements, the scars on her round and innocent knees, and certain gestures, like putting the sole of her right foot crookedly on top of her left if she was waiting or was bored—a characteristic of boys as well as girls, but one which is typically prepubescent.

Oh, don't laugh! I'm not so simple as to confuse immaturity with innocence! Blandine was wily as they come, and I was to learn this in a rather cutting way. It is my opinion that a child, because it isn't distracted or blinded by sexual or emotional stirrings, is sometimes capable of being more cunning than an adolescent wrestling with all his moods. It is not unusual for puberty to turn a bright and lively child into an awkward goose. More than anything else, Blandine was incredibly feminine. I have often had occasion to observe this exquisite precociousness in young girls, sometimes young enough to be virtually babies. At barely two years old some of them know that a man is a man and this makes them behave in a way you could only call coquettish. By comparison, little boys remain witless idiots—except of course where their mothers are concerned—until the age of their first emission. Blandine had taken possession of the house, the garden, and of me with imperial ease, and I let myself slip into a situation which had all the flavor of a fairy-tale.

Then a day came when she did not appear. And another day. For an entire week I anxiously awaited her. My only consolation was to listen to the chattering in the playground, telling myself that her voice was part of it. The weekend was all the more gloomy because the weather was so superb. On the Monday, I did the clumsy, stupid thing I had been trying to avoid for a week: laying myself open to the gossip of the whole district, I went to wait for her at the school gate.

She came straight up to me and simply said:

"Daddy wants to see you."

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Here was a threat that had been hovering over us since our first meeting, and which I should have averted by taking the initiative—and no doubt I would have averted it, if Blandine had not inexplicably frustrated every impulse I had had to visit her family.

"Whenever it suits him. What time does he want to come and see me?"

"He gets home from work at seven."

"Tomorrow, then, at seven-thirty."

"I'll tell him."

And she walked away, very straight, very solemn, with none of the sprightly grace she normally displayed at my home or in my company. One felt clearly that from now on her father's ghost was watching over her, enshrouding her in an atmosphere of stern disapproval.

From that moment on, I waited. Whatever I did—and I had an order for five hundred color prints that required all my time, if not all my attention—was no more than a distraction and a gnawing restlessness. I am made in such a way that certain periods of waiting dominate my life to the exclusion of any other activity or any unrelated thought—and these periods are in fact despotic. This proud, avenging father . . . what accusations would be thrown in my face? Feverishly, I summoned up the memory of all of Blandine's visits, all the hours we had spent together, and in all honesty I could find no real cause for guilt. But Blandine was at that deliciously ambiguous age when tenderness may be confused with desire, and a friendly tussle with a lover's hug. How readily we bachelors are seen as seducers, where most of the time we are simply seduced—the quarry, not the hunter, the victim, not the torturer!

The bell rang. He had arrived. I had expected a wrathful patriarch, upright, awesome, but I was quite wrong. He was a little man with a sad, pale face under a beret pulled right down to his ears. A worker's knapsack—for his midday snack, no doubt—completed his exhausted appearance.

He sat on the edge of a chair.

"Blandine told me you wanted to talk to me," he began.

The fact that the conversation opened with this lie increased my uneasiness, especially since I could not tell whether it was Blandine's or her father's. Nevertheless, it gave me leverage, and I seized the chance immediately.

"That's right. She comes to see me quite often—so it's natural that I should introduce myself to her parents."

I asked what I could offer him. He finally opted for a glass of

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beer. No thanks, he didn't smoke. There was a long silence. It was amazing how little we had to say to each other. I watched him with incredulous attention, saying to myself over and over, without being able to credit it: "This man is Blandine's father. He gave her life. He sees and embraces her every day." How strange the natural order sometimes is! For his part, he was looking around with curiosity.

"Blandine has told me a lot about your house," he said.

I was saddened for a moment by the thought that Blandine was perhaps less fond of me than of my house where she was mistress—doubtless things were very different in her own home. I stood up and offered to give him a guided tour. Perhaps this would help establish mutual trust. The ground floor, with its living room in which we stood, the study, the kitchen, the toilet, the door to the cellar stairs. On the first floor, the bathroom and four bedrooms . . . But the principal area was up above: the furnished loft, panelled with finely cut pine. This was my photographic studio. I had my bed up there as well, because I like to sleep among my flash-lights, trays, tripods and cameras. When I was a schoolboy I used to put the book which had the lesson for tomorrow that I knew least of all under my pillow for the night. I thought that by sleeping with the text so near my brain it would inscribe itself there by a kind of telepathy. It is no doubt a comparable belief that makes me take my rest near the equipment to which I owe my living and my freedom.

"It's big," said Blandine's father.

Big? Well, of course a country house will always have more room than an apartment in the city. But, as I pointed out to him, with all my professional activities I was "big" enough myself to fill up all this space.

"Still, it *is* big," he insisted, shaking his head.

Then, as if it were perfectly natural, he went on to talk about his own housing problems. No doubt Blandine had already told me. Soon they were going to have to move. The small farm where they had been tenants for eleven years—well, in fact from the time Blandine was born—was to be repossessed by the landlord, who, in order to be sure of getting rid of them, had found them substitute accommodation thirty kilometers away. One of those custom-built villages where rows of identical houses face each other over rectangles of grass the size of a rug.

"So, there we are," he concluded, "I came to ask if you knew of anything in the neighborhood." You never can tell, something

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might come up, even a house that was a bit ramshackle that he could set about repairing. He wasn't too fussy.

I gave my word, touched by this appeal for help and mentally did the rounds of the people I knew. But it was clear that in this district, overtaken by holiday houses, space is more and more stingily allotted to people of modest means. I promised to ask around, certainly, but my tone of voice betrayed that I had little hope.

Nor, however, did he and that's not what he was expecting of me. His grey face lit up with a smile and, as if he were seized with a sudden inspiration, he pointed towards the staircase.

"But look at your place! You've got plenty of room! Since you're always on the second floor in your loft, why don't you rent us *the first floor*?"

This abrupt proposal caught me off guard. It took my breath away. And he was quick to press the point, as if my choking silence indicated consent.

"We don't take up much room, you know, my wife and I and the four kids and Pipo."

"Pipo?"

"Yes, the dog."

I had completely forgotten him, and I now remembered that huge friendly brute knocking over my frames and cocking his leg on my lavender.

Finally I regained my composure. No really, it was impossible. I couldn't dream of it. I was less alone than I appeared to be. Friends came to visit me. Family too. The rest of the time, I needed peace for my work. And this house—because it was high and narrow—made privacy impossible. Whenever somebody was in one of the bedrooms, I could feel it, even if that person was utterly discreet.

I spoke like this for a long time, softly, my words all the while insinuating a firm rejection of his crazy proposal.

His smile took some time to fade away, as he lowered his eyes to the bottom of his glass in which he was mechanically swirling the dregs of his beer.

"It's a pity," he murmured, "a real pity."

Then suddenly, he looked at me. His lips still bore the vague trace of a smile, but his small grey eyes stared, hard and nasty.

"Yes, it's a real pity. Because if we don't find anything, well, we'll be gone, won't we? And Blandine, well, she'll be gone too!"

Translated from the French by Penny Hueston and Colin Nettelbeck

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Jiri Klobouk

THE MUSIC TEACHER

At the end of March I had my forty-sixth birthday. Evening was approaching. I sat at the window with my hands between my knees. I couldn't even remember when my last student left. That morning I had gotten up right away, put on a clean shirt and matching socks, sewed a few more buttons on my vest, paid special attention to my hair, and even thought about wearing a tie. But I guess everybody regarded this as a passing eccentricity. The whole day through no one even once asked me whether I was going to a wedding or something. I was certainly not going to tell anybody it was my birthday if they couldn't figure it out from the sudden changes in my appearance. The only people who remembered were my father and mother. They wrote me a letter, each half a page, telling me to watch my health and wishing me continued success in my creative life and work. Who would have thought that in a few days I would receive such sad news? At that time my father was still energetically planning his forthcoming activities, and my most recent piece of information was that he and my mother were going to take a bus to Brno to see Dvořák's opera *Jakobin*. I couldn't complain about my life then either, and every evening before going to sleep I was thankful that bad luck hadn't dogged my footsteps and that I didn't know what it was like to have to wrestle with fate. That birthday evening I noticed that the window needed a new coat of paint, but I just didn't feel like getting involved with such trivialities. The surrounding musical instruments, for example, or the street below, were indisputably of much more importance to me.

Besides the violin I teach piano, and during the lessons I usually look out the window at the same street I have been looking at for years, as if these two things, the street and music, are linked inseparably. The street is called Uphill Street, and on it, in addition to a dairy store, a meat store, and a tavern named *The Austrian's*, you can see among the vaulted arches resting on rickety chairs, in almost all kinds of weather, the "wrinklies" and the "shrivellies," as I call the old people who compete with each other all day long in silence. Quite a few of them already have one foot in the grave. Most of them die in the middle of a word they never manage to get out, or when they have just decided to finish knitting the sleeve of a sweater begun

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two years before and have just started to look around for a ball of yarn which has rolled off somewhere. Some of them, on the other hand, drop a paper bag stuffed with worn socks and stockings, almost all of them revealing a hole the size of a twenty-five heller piece. If you think how often these feet have crisscrossed the world, you should not be surprised that they are gnarled and that their unclipped toenails are so long that for some time now they haven't fit into their leather shoes. It takes years, however, before they claw their way out to daylight through the soft plush of their checkered house slippers which have often lost their ladder-shaped, silver-colored metal buckles. No wonder they hang off the feet like bags of sand being dragged along wherever the feet go.

No less successful a character in this scene is the mailman. Reminiscent of the Pied Piper, with scrawny and pale spider-legs he staggers around like a beginner on stilts. He always starts his rounds early in the morning on Lower Square and then heads uphill, plodding his way from building to building until he reaches mine, and then he distributes what he has left in his satchel. Up here the street ends, unless he would be able to sprout wings and take off over the roofs. Every morning it is as if I have brought him closer with magnifying lenses right on the palm of my hand, the piper without his pipe, rats or spell-bound children trailing after him, while a little bit of that unearthly paradise protrudes from his jacket. By the butcher shop he steps over a black-and-white cat, Micka, stretching herself in the blood-specked dust and looking for a tidbit, a succulent little mouse. But she is out of luck. Instead, an earnest apprentice is being given an official envelope with an announcement that once again there is no meat today, but that tomorrow there might be meat for both days, we would have to see.

A warning sign forbids entrance into the street to automobiles of all makes and sizes. Only ambulance drivers are permitted to cross this demarcation line. They come right up to the door of every building, even *The Orange Moon* and *The Fair Mayoress*, load in the sick people and take them to the hospital at Bulovka or, if they are dead, to the same place for postmortems. An abandoned chair, like a stage prop kicked aside after the end of a Shakespearean drama, remains unoccupied and unnoticed, regardless of whether a rainbow shines or snowflakes drift slowly down. And so the days go by, one after the other, until someone else gets old and becomes the next shrivelly in the sequence, shuffling along, his legs hurting off and on. He bows ludicrously to all sides and, leaning on his warped little

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cane, sits down with obvious relief, and in doing so tears a patch on his left knee for the hundredth time. But this is nothing when you consider that just the other day a bird flew about our heads, one of those extinct pterodactyls, and from its beak fell an eye which once belonged to a fish, living at the bottom of the Indian Ocean. It rolled down the roof of a neighboring house and lodged in a gutter pipe. There the whole night long it shone like a pearl.

The houses here, though not completely dilapidated, are very old and have certainly witnessed a great deal. They have seen Dalibor-from-Kozojed led past in shackles on his way to the central prison in the new circular tower behind the Burgrave's house above the Stag's Ditch. Every building is decorated with a relief or possesses a balcony of historical value. In other times passers-by would tremble at the thought of dove droppings falling on some valuable statue. In my enchanted eyes Uphill Street is like a vein pulsing in my neck, and the slightest pressure applied anywhere on it would be fatal. I know this little corner of the city in every season of the year, in spring when the sun is still weak but the surrounding gardens are already fragrant, and during a dark winter night when a mournful wind whistles through the icicles. As I sit at my piano or convulsively finger the bow of my violin, I gaze at my dear street with its doorways, stairways and railings bathed in the serene flow of gas lamps. I no longer count every chimney, tower or weather vane as I did when, as a country lad, I first rushed breathlessly into the capital and stood motionless on street corners for hours on end. I have a much better memory for these: there are four thousand six hundred and sixty-three of them, and that's only as far as I can see in rainy weather. The slate roofs get grayer every day, but that still doesn't mean the world is coming to an end. The air used to be cleaner, that's for sure. It used to be like healthy mountain air compared to what we breathe now. I kept the window wide open, sometimes even in February, since I prefer freezing to denying my lungs their due. But times change, and sometimes I wake up without knowing why, and when I walk up the steps with my milk-can, I try to figure out each time I rest how many steps are left to the attic. And when I let down the cracked blind at night, I only do it so I can sleep a little longer than the night before.

So that's what my forty-sixth birthday was like. Sitting in the evening by the window and meditating about all this. If you were to imagine an actor on a stage exploding before your eyes into countless minute particles which heal your sore feelings and demoralized

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soul, well, the life of a music teacher isn't much different. Instead of words, it is microscopic specks which contain the miracle of the simple note which I try to smuggle inconspicuously into the hearts of my more attentive students. Although they don't ask, I can see in their eyes the age-old question of why it is that whenever they touch music they begin to shake and tremble uncontrollably, while at other times they are filled with shame at their own imperfection and run off sobbing into the woods. Or, they ask, how did it all start with me anyway? How did I wind up in this blissful imprisonment, from which I certainly have no intention of trying to hack my way out? Quite the contrary, in fact. Where did it all begin? Perhaps it was a lark singing high above a field of ripening rye, a train rumbling in the distance somewhere in a fog-enshrouded valley, or one of my coat buttons brushing against the metal gate of a chateau garden. And that faint clink, a chance sound, that germ of a melancholy refrain stuck in my ears, and I stood there rooted to the spot, bound and chained. I listened, almost moved to tears, and you would have needed at least a pair of oxen to extract me from that embrace as you would pull some giant turnip from the ground, and even then you would have cursed and cracked the whip at me for resisting them. And what if, after groping in the golden twilight, you succeed in finding that hypnotizing variety of tones: it is waiting for you like an unfamiliar face, so that from the very beginning it is difficult to guess whom the face belongs to and where this unpredictable current will drag us. Who are you, you ask, and what are you doing here? And how is it I've never heard of you before? But the face is silent in that same contrite manner in which the breath stops in music. If you want to enjoy a closing forte, you have to extract the answer by kissing until the ardor of your feelings causes it to melt away in your embrace, note by note, until only empty lines remain on the pink paper, and you hang on them by your fingers like a thief on a fence, and they find you there, a hopeless case, a vagrant, a ragamuffin, completely in the power of this profligate seductress.

I accidentally grazed a few piano keys with my elbow. It sounded like the muffled background of many voices, a rumbling of thunder or an angry bear, and right away I came out of the swoon of my birthday thoughts. Once a year, I comforted myself, I can indulge in such an extravagance, let my imagination go, like some kind of Robinson Crusoe without his trusty man Friday. Whenever I found myself in trouble, a French horn would sound somewhere

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nearby, and this was what always kept my head above water. Just a sound, a sweet tone, and I would feel better right away. The wrinklies, all rumpled up in trench coats with torn pockets, with hats pulled all the way down to their ears and with scarves wrapped around their necks and over their mouths, rotated on their chairs. The one whose last tooth had come loose and gotten stuck in his upper gum spat into his handkerchief and almost fell over onto the March sidewalk. The butcher's cat, Micka, had carelessly crawled into an ashcan, which was now clattering up and down, and I crossed myself, hoping the cat would get out soon so I wouldn't have to make a move myself to see that the poor animal hadn't gone crazy. Earlier, before the sun disappeared behind the horizon, it splashed us in a fiery color. We looked to each other like Holesovice slaughterhouse workers in the last minutes of a fratricidal shift.

Just after the return from my last Christmas visit in Derfle, I started to transcribe Schumann's "Butterflies" for two instruments, and there is someone I can't thank enough for that happy inspiration. Whenever we feel like it, while I play violin, Milena Waleska accompanies me on the piano. She is my most talented student. At the beginning we were just groping around and bumping senselessly into each other, but after countless hours, days and weeks of relentless self-destruction, physical rending apart and merging together, nothing remained concealed any more, and now we are able to give ourselves body and soul to these flights into the unattainable, and in this current of listening to each other our bodies and souls intertwine, groan and make confession together, as in the fashion of a ritual or sacrifice to a god of absolute forbearance, or of bathing in the distant River Ganges. Finally, we stand in front of each other naked and inseparable, without having touched each other except through the medium of our resounding instruments. That's how it is between us. We are consecrated in thorns and clawed by them, but we are healable. I may be accused of petty secretiveness if I don't confess that I was wishing fervently that down on the Lower Square a streetcar would stop and M.W. would get out and wave her kerchief from a corner in greeting to a celebrant leaning out of a window in a somewhat crazy mood. I recalled now how she had once made a pen and ink drawing of me. She sketched me sitting at the window, with a few strokes showing how I would look at myself from outside, where I was sitting at the window and watching myself. It was like some kind of tunnel made up only of views out the window

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and of me looking at myself. Ultimately, it could have been any man of about my age with rather long, somewhat graying hair, but of course I have kept the picture as a souvenir anyway.

Around midnight I wound up placing a candle in front of myself because of the darkness, and I waited to see if I would hear some hurrying footsteps which would remind me of her at least a little. The gas lights flickered as usual, the thick air broke up their glare into uneven rays, and if it hadn't been for the forsaken chairs and the late hour, I would have been hard put to tell sleep from reality. In a short time, as if at the snap of one's fingers, down on Lower Square where it merged with Uphill Street, a delivery truck stopped, a rusty jalopy covered with a canvas protecting its load against unpredictable weather and highway dust. Two sturdy butchers' helpers jumped out. I recognized them from their blood-splotched aprons. One tossed a huge joint of meat onto the other's shoulder and they were soon horsing it toward the shop, which was somewhat set back in the arcade. They hung the meat up on a hook in the display window and disappeared. Their movements had military precision, as if practiced for a long time, with each maneuver calculated to within inches. It all happened so fast that for a while my eyes kept wandering from one place to the other, from where the jalopy had stood a moment before to the store window with the meat hanging from the hook, which from the cross-cut of its muscle structure and fat was undoubtedly beef.

Time in these noctural hours knew no bounds. It flowed everywhere you looked along the roofs, and it crawled like dough out of every garret window, when suddenly a streetcar stopped in Lower Square. I stood up on tiptoe and saw only a trolley wheel and sparks from the overhead wire. Later it dawned on me who could be coming to visit me or anybody else at this hour, and I nearly fell into the street when I heard her steps. After a while she appeared, but I couldn't fathom whom that spotted face belonged to, a harbinger of the pregnancy of an undeveloped thirteen-year-old. In one hand she held a folder with sheet music for Schumann's "Butterflies" with the initials M.W. on it, in the other she waved a jump rope over her head and skipped rope a bit whenever she couldn't resist the urge. The girl's breathless exertion—but also her roguish laughter—reached all the way here, and who knows how it all would have turned out if on the Vltava by the Manes Bridge a steamer called *The Eternal Wanderer* hadn't woke me up with a sharp whistle and unexpectedly I found myself lying in the bed. My father was still alive

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then, and he didn't call quietly to me from his corner at the grand piano, but outside I could hear some bumblebee-like buzzing while the milkman's helper dragged empty milkcans along the sidewalk toward Lower Square to turn them in there for full ones. The tavern *The Austrian's* was emptying its patrons, still boisterous, onto the street. The butcher's cat, now free, was meowing behind the chimney on the nearest roof, in all likelihood swishing back and forth her black and white tail. I could also imagine that the rusty shrivellies were already up and thoroughly discombobulated, their wrinkled bodies shaking from the racket in the rapidly disappearing night. Only the bumblebee buzzing was incomprehensible, and it pulled me sleepily from the bed back to the window to take a look. The inhabitants of our capital had formed a long line for meat, stretching from the butcher shop down Uphill Street all the way to Lower Square where it dropped from the sight around the corner.

Translated from the Czech by Charles E. Townsend

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POEMS

John Hollander

DEPARTURE: A VIEW OUT THE WINDOW

No jewel, no beetle like a clump
Of fire, still glitters as you go
Down our old street where taxis flow,
Buses hiss, manhole-covers bump.

No pearl of cloudy promise clings
To this departure, incomplete
And awkward in the roaring street,
Nothing of youthful windwardings.

A farewell on a coastwise trip
Rejoining in some warmer port?
Or sailing of another sort
In a great unreturning ship.

Squealing brakes are the sea-gull's cry,
Dull pigeon-gray must do for white,
And now, your steamer, out of sight
Only lends texture to the sky.

AN OLD STORY IS RETOLD

Great, dark wings, passing my roof over
Confound, rather than reassure:
What am I left with to endure?
What love will forty years recover?

The primal steps of freedom pound
Across the dry floor of the deep
In annual echo now, the sleep
Of exile cushioning the sound;

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And the long march through wilderness
And out and into wild once more,
The olive leaves of each new shore
Spelling out writs of dispossess.

Our own diasporas begin
With first steps toward a rising sun,
Shading themselves, before they've done,
Conducting their own evening in.

May we live past this winter, then
When harps are cold and fingers numb,
Jerusalemed, the year to come,
In one another's arms again.

Rita Dove

CRAB-BOIL

(Ft. Myers, 1962)

Why do I remember the sky
above the forbidden beach,
why only blue and the scratch,
shell on tin, of their distress?
The rest

imagination supplies:
bucket and angry pink beseeching
claws. Why does Aunt Helen
laugh before saying "Look at that—

a bunch of niggers, not
a-one get out 'fore the others pull him
back." I don't believe her—

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just as I don't believe *they* won't come
and chase us back to the colored-only shore
crisp with litter and broken glass.

"When do we kill them?"
"Kill 'em? Hell, the water does *that*.
They don't feel a thing . . . no nervous system."

I decide to believe this: I'm hungry.
Dismantled, they're merely exotic,
a blushing meat. After all, she *has*
grown old in the South. If
we're kicked out now, I'm ready.

William Meredith

A COUPLE OF TREES

The two oaks lean apart for light.
They aren't as strong as lone oaks
but in a wind they give each other lee.

Daily since I cleared them I can see
them, tempting to chain saw and ax—
two hard-woods, leaning like that for light.

A hurricane tore through the state one night,
picking up roof and hen-house, boat and dock.
Those two stood: leafless, twigless, giving lee.

Last summer ugly slugs unleafed the trees.
Environmental kids wrote *Gypsy Moths Suck*.
The V of naked oaks leaned to the light

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for a few weeks, then put out slight
second leaves, scar-tissue pale as bracts,
bandaged comrades, lending each other lee.

How perilous in one another's V
our lives are, yoked in this yoke:
two men, leaning apart for light,
but in a wind who give each other lee.

IN THE RIF MOUNTAINS

(Northern Morocco)

Geology set this story down so long ago
it's a wonder it's still legible.
But the stylized hand is still clearly Arabic,
dark against the pale tan tablets of mountainside.

The violence of what's being told is belied
by the formal language of old rock,
as is the case with the later chronicles
written by, and about, smaller convulsions, men.
How shapely the various grammars that record
the brief cycles in which our substance roils and cools.
And the violence in each case is belied
a second time: the elegant calligraphy of rock and quill.

Yet close-to, the running, friable stone,
leached and pitted, no longer looks like writing
but like spotted backs of old geology's hands.
They rest translucent, calm, the dreadful story told
and left here on these slanting tablets
for the tribes that will presently enter.

The tribes enter. They read the rocks as their Homer—
the source of a thousand years of manners,
the model for the heats and seisms

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that will harden into the Rifs of their dynasties
and then erode to build the foothills of their blood,
as it has been told.

THE JAIN BIRD HOSPITAL IN DELHI

Outside the hotel window, unenlightened pigeons
weave and dive like Stukas on their prey,
apparently some tiny insect brother.
(In India, the attainment of non-violence
is considered a proper goal for human beings).
If one of the pigeons should fly into the illusion

of my window and survive (the body is no illusion
when it's hurt) he could be taken across town to the bird-
hospital where Jains, skilled medical men,
repair the feathery sick and broken victims.
There, in reproof of violence
and of nothing else, live Mahavira's brothers and sisters.

To this small, gentle order of monks and nuns
it is bright Vishnu and dark Shiva who are illusion.
They trust in faith, cognition and non-violence
to release them from rebirth. They think that birds
and animals—like us, some predators, some prey—
should be ministered to no less than men and women.

The Jains who deal with creatures (and with laymen)
wear white, while their more enterprising hermit brothers
walk naked and are called *the sky-clad*. Jains pray
to no deity, human kindness being their sole illusion.
Mahavira and those twenty-three other airy creatures
who turned to saints with him, preached the doctrine of *ahimsa*,

which in our belligerent tongue becomes *non-violence*.
It's not a doctrine congenial to snarers and poultrymen,
who every day bring to market maimed pheasants.

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Numbers of these are bought in by the Jain brothers
and brought, to grow back wing-tips and illusions,
to one of the hospitals succoring such small quarry.

When strong and feathered again, the lucky victims
get reborn on Sunday mornings to the world's violence,
released from the roofs of these temples to illusion.
It is hard for a westerner to speak about men and women
like these, who call the birds of the air *brothers*.
We recall the embarrassed fanfare for Francis and his flock.

We're poor forked sky-clad things ourselves
and God knows prey to illusion—*e.g.*, I claim these brothers
and sisters in India, stemming a little violence, among birds.

Katerina Anghelake Rooke

PENELOPE SAYS

I wasn't weaving, I wasn't knitting
I started to write, and I kept effacing
under the weight of the words
because the perfect expression is blocked
when it is constrained by inner pain.
And although absence is the theme of my life
—absence from life—
tears fall on the paper
and the physical pain of the body
which is deprived.

I erase, I tear up, I drown
the quickened cries
"where are you, come I'm waiting for you
this spring is not like other springs"
and I start anew in the morning
with new birds and white sheets

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to dry in the sun.
You will never be here
to water the flowers with the hose
the old ceilings dripping
loaded with rain
and my own personality
dissolved in yours
serene, autumnal . . .
Your eclectic heart
—eclectic because I selected it—
will always be elsewhere
and I with words will be cutting
the threads that bind me
to the particular man
for whom I feel nostalgic
till Odysseus becomes a symbol of Nostalgia
voyaging the seas
of everyone's mind.
I forget you with passion
each day
to cleanse yourself of sins
of sweetness and fragrance
and now quite immaculate
to enter immortality.
It is a difficult and thankless work.
My only reward will be
if in the end I understand
what is human presence
what absence
or how ego functions
in such loneliness, for so long a time
that the tomorrow does not stop with anything
the body always renews itself
it rises and falls on the bed
as if hewed down
sometimes sick and sometimes in love

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hoping
that whatever is lost in sense
is gained in essence.

Translated from the Greek by Rae Dalven

Phillis Levin

OUT OF CHAOS

No wonder some prefer a narrow hall,
A single room where doubts die
Until possibility, that odd flower,
Returns its face.

The doors close and open every day.

The doors close and open every day
And every day we hurtle toward the city.

Today I saw the usual human disaster:
Head in her chest, legs pocked with pink wounds,
Fingers wrapped tight around a white handbag.

Then the subway doors opened and children
Piled in: the whole car filled with their high
Broken music.

At the next stop they all poured out;
The car was vacant, solemn, the air
Settled and clear—but she was still there.

Outside a lilac bush blows to the wind,

And everywhere one looks
A pre-Socratic flux
Streams down avenues

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Of taxicabs and radios,
Mortality's parade crowned with neon and chrome—

As if we were beasts evolving toward a sentence
That breaks and disperses before we arrive
At the city we promised to build.

THE LITTLE BOY WHO FELL

The little boy who fell into the well
Knows not the darkening measure
Scaling the moss-fed rocks to a future
Neither the President nor Pope foretell.

The helicopter carrying the head
Of state whirs round a space, obscure
By day, that casts up silver coins and stars
The little boy, until his falling, counted,

Wondering, wide awake in bed,
How many and how far they are that fall,
Whistling like spinning tops until
They blur into their speed

Before they lean and teeter,
Nodding the way grandmama does as she falls
Fast asleep in her chair.
He was pulled from a dream by the bells

This morning, remembering the murmur,
Mother murmured, lives inside a chamber
Of his heart—how he hears his heartbeat beat
Like a cricket caught

And shuts his eyes tight to concentrate
His fear into a creature
Whose limbs he smashes when they sprout
Sharp shards of ice greener

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Than the grass
Tickling his face—
O mother it is so far,
O father it is so deep,

And so unlike your bodies
It is cold and steep,
Not a place for sleep,
A mute and monstrous

Darkness in which hunger
Feeds on terror and terror
Devours hunger when your voices
Warm no longer

One who,
Unreturned to day's bottomless
Blue, swims in a slow-motion race
Through measures of unmeasure,

In himself a buried treasure.

Tomasz Jastrun

SNOW

On the crawling bellies of the tanks
The snow falls
On the stunted eagle
Printed on the soldiers' caps
The snow falls
Through the chinks of our broken homes
On the policeman who looks for me
And on the flowers
I didn't get a chance to buy
The snow falls

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On the poems
Which will be buried under
On the people I won't see again
On my anger
Which can't escape
From the borders of my hands
The snow falls
On our lives
The gaps in our busted teeth

TRIAL

In Suwalki a trial continues
The accused a young girl
In the audience three people
Her husband plus two informers
The Soviet border nearby
A strip of drying blood
Beyond the window the city
Rots like a half-eaten apple
The girl brushes back her hair
With each word she says of freedom
She sees her shred of light
Flicker dead in the tunnel before her
Beyond the window a dog barks
An engine sputters dead
Doors close
The trial in Suwalki continues
One of a thousand trials
The accused is allowed the floor
She speaks of freedom now so faintly
As if she were out of breath
From running up the stairs to her apartment
(She realizes this home is no longer hers)
Each judge has a yawn and a gaping hollow
His short black gullet of conscience
Doors close
A well-oiled court's clicking gears

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A picture from the 50s—maybe

But what is any different now
Just the constant turning inside out
Of a shirt soaked with sweat strain and blood

VISITATION

Four of them
In the middle of the night
One in uniform
One with crowbar
Two with smiles

Where's your husband
They raced off to check each room
Swished the drapes back and forth
Their breath frosted that of our sleeping child
Then they each found a chair
To wait me out

Four angels of communion
In their mouths black tidings from on high

Translated from the Polish by Daniel Bourne

Marguerite Bouvard

BALLAD OF THE BACK

We who have become inured
by scale, watching South Africa
burn, Ethiopia dwindle, who flee into ciphers

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of power, for whom even nakedness
has become an abstraction,
can learn from the life of the back.

It is the back that receives the rod,
that fetches and hauls.
It carries our life

like a house with many rooms.
In them stretch the corridors where
we chisel our days out of rock.

The back hides all that quivers.
It opens and closes like a door,
against others, against

ourselves. But it is also the back
which flows like silk beneath a lover's
hand, which shimmers like water,

like the open space in a forest.
It is a glade murmuring with voices.
It bears all the touch of the world.

Alfred Corn

LETTER TO TERESA GUICCIOLI

Missolonghi, March 3, 1824

Pietro's letter will have satisfied you
With the account of our health and safety.
We are tolerably tranquil—and except
An earthquake or two daily—(one of which
Broke the Lambico for filtering the water)
They rock us to and fro a little—things
Are much as when we wrote before. I miss
Last year's travels, the stops at Ithaca

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And other places to which the remembrance of
Ulysses and his family are attached.
Of political news we can say but little
As little is actually known—and even that
Partly contradictory. I write in English
As you desired, and I suppose that you
Are as well acquainted with that language
As ever you were. Though I am not there
To speak it to you, I think we must agree
That many an ill encounter has been avoided.
When I call up thoughts of Ravenna—the Count
Myself and you, as we made our few improvements
On marriage—can there ever have been found
Cavaliere servente as ill-suited
To the role? Here are arrived—English—
Germans—Greeks—bond and free—all kinds
And conditions in short, and all with something
To say to me—so that every day I have
To receive them here or go to find them
In Argostoli. Of the Greeks I can't say much
Hitherto as I should prefer not to speak
Ill of them—however much they do so
Of one another. I suppose despisers
Of Turkish despots will serve as well here
As lovers of Greeks. Messers. Trelawney
And Browne are in the Morea—where they
Have been well received. Do not imagine
A soldier's grave for me—nor even that
An earthquake in league with the barbarian
Will send me and the Suliotes down
A newly opened path to meet King Minos.
I still hope to see you in Spring—mean time
Entreat you to quiet your apprehensions
And believe me ever your

Amico ed amante in eterno + + + +

Noel Byron

P.S. Pietro fell sick, but thanks to the attentions of Doctor Bruno (whom we have rebaptized Brunetto *Latini*, as he is rather pedantic), he is now returned to a state of good health.

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Bernard Grossman

THE QUANTUM GEOMETRY OF THE UNIVERSE

One of the most challenging questions that man can ask is whether the universe had a beginning and, if so, what it was like. If there was a beginning, then it is only natural to ask what happened before the beginning. This question challenges the usual conception of a static space, a background in which the objects of the universe are placed, and of a uniform time which orders events that occur in space. One must wrestle with the question of a dynamical space and time, which can be created, perhaps literally out of nothing. Contemporary science has been examining these concepts from several fronts.

Einstein was intrigued by the question of whether space and time were a priori concepts, as Kant declared, or mental constructs. Prompted by Einstein's questions, Piaget studied the development of the child's conception of space, time and velocity. After years of observation of children discovering the world around them, he concluded that children construct their notion of space and time through progressive modification and equilibration of internal mental structures. There are progressive stages indicative of a child's development during which some concepts are bewildering, others clear, and others only partially understood. Children proceed through these stages by the accommodation of primitive rhythms and inclinations synchronously with their assimilation of the external reality until the two are in equilibrium. An equilibrium is established by the complete grasping of concepts only partially understood before. With this understanding, children can experience reality on a new basis with new conceptual tools. Therefore, unlike Kant's static conception of an a priori space-time, children construct space-time based upon development of congenital structures and experience with the real world.

Modern physics is also challenging our basic intuitions of space and time. The possibility that these are constructs arises from attempts to overcome an impasse that theoretical physics has been facing for many years. Such an impasse is typical of the period that precedes a scientific revolution. The two fundamental breakthroughs in physics, born in previous revolutions in the twen-

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tieth century, the quantum theory and the theory of relativity, have created new modes of perception and have led to new technologies that pervade science and society. Yet these two developments are as yet irreconcilable.

Quantum mechanics and relativity have each been very successful within their own realms of validity. However, there are fundamental conflicts when both are needed to explain phenomena, as in the physics of the beginning of the universe. In recent years, much of theoretical physics research has been concentrated around a new idea, called string theory, that could bring about a synthesis of these two theories. The synthesis proposed by string theory is also typical of scientific revolutions in that it shows the older theories to be not incorrect, but rather to be approximations to a deeper, more complete theory.

Given the great consequences, both constructive and destructive, of quantum mechanics and relativity, such as transistors, nuclear energy and nuclear weapons, it is interesting to imagine what the synthesis of these ideas portends. In terms of physics research, the theory's advocates believe that this new idea will lead to the long sought-for unified theory of all interactions in nature. The research proceeds with a faith that esthetics, simplicity and uniqueness will lead to a deeper theory that will resolve the logical and observational conflicts. The search may have led us today to a new scientific revolution, in the tradition of those launched by Newton's *Principia*, Einstein's theory of relativity, and the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics. Almost everyone in the field is convinced that something remarkable is taking place, but exactly what it is is unscientifically imprecise. In particular, if the revolution is to be compared to that launched by Newton, the *Principia* has probably not yet been written and the effort will be more collective, as well as more challenging.

Unlike the previous revolutionary ideas, which had solid testable consequences, string theory, as yet, has no such consequences. It is, simply, the only theory we know that could be acceptable mathematically and esthetically. It may, therefore, be a form of mathematical metaphysics. We may remember that scientific investigation can develop out of questions asked first within the course of philosophical, or metaphysical speculation. The relation of psychological investigation to the classical empiricism of Berkeley, Hume, and Locke comes to mind. Within this framework, current research in string theory might just be a transitional phase.

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The current, frenzied pace of research in string theory began with a technical breakthrough in 1984 by John Schwarz of The California Institute of Technology and Michael Green of Cambridge University. They had continued their research in string theory for ten years, long after most other physicists had forsaken the field. Their paper, in the fall of 1984, immediately caused excitement, particularly at Princeton University, that can be compared to the anticipation of an approaching Armageddon. Many physicists, even Nobel Prize winners, dropped everything they were doing to work on string theory. Top researchers proclaimed that the end of physics was near, with no difficulties anticipated in the explanation of all the mysteries of the subnuclear world. Ninety percent of the young physicists in graduate school wanted to work on string theory. The atmosphere at conferences was, at moments, like that of revivalist meetings. While theoretical physics has always been prone to trendiness, the intensity of the research in string theory is unsurpassed in recent history. In the summer of 1985, at a workshop on string theory at Santa Barbara, California, a reporter from *Omni* Magazine waited outside the lecture hall in anticipation of hundreds of physicists running outside, screaming "Eureka! It's unified! It's unified!"

However, as exciting as string theory is, there is as yet no evidence from the physical world that it is the correct theory. This is not meant to sound pessimistic, but realistic. To conclude the story of the reporter in Santa Barbara, he needed to borrow ten dollars from me on the final day of the conference in order to eat and get to the airport. He didn't have money because he didn't have a story. What is anticipated as a theory of everything has yet to be proved to be a theory of anything. One physicist has gone so far as to suggest that science is leading us to a renewal of the Dark Ages, with ideas unencumbered by experimental verification, and with pseudo-unifications replacing pseudo-Messiahs.

The most interesting development, so far, in string theory has been of a conceptual and technical nature. The clash between gravity and quantum mechanics is, in its confrontation of two distinct realms of knowledge, reminiscent of the mind-body problem. Philosophers have agonized over whether the mind can arise as a consequence of the same physical principles that govern the physiological functioning of the body. Many biologists, computer scientists and physicists hope to model the functioning of the mind by a

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complex system governed by the laws of physics, such as a computer. Similarly, physicists are resolved that there must be a complex, constructive link between quantum mechanics, whose importance is most apparent in the subnuclear world, and gravity, whose affects are most manifest in cosmological and astrophysical settings. The ideas of quantum mechanics and of gravity seem as far from each other as the essential differences between the mind and the body. Only a radically new idea might transcend such seeming incompatibility.

String theory is now in its third incarnation. It began in the 1960s with the work of Gabrielle Veneziano at Cern, to describe the strong interaction at the heart of nuclear physics. The resulting model, called the dual resonance model, tried to explain the observed states of nuclear physics as oscillatory modes, like the different notes produced by a violin string. Despite numerous interesting results, the theory in its first incarnation was inconsistent with a description of the nuclear world. However, one could easily have said, "The string is dead, long live the string," because string theory was resurrected as a theory of gravity in the 1970s.

One of the problems was that Veneziano's string theory is consistent as a physical theory only in twenty-six space-time dimensions. An important advance in the seventies was the introduction of the spinning string or super-string which reduced the number of dimensions to ten. Although this number is still too large for the observable universe of three spatial dimensions plus time, it led to a new idea to describe all of the known interactions.

Elementary particles, like electrons and neutrinos, exhibit regularities much like the chemical elements. The regularities of the elements were explained by the periodic table, the Rosetta stone of chemistry. String theorists hope to find the Rosetta stone for physics by considering the extra six dimensions as curled up in something like a small ball, so small it cannot be observed by known means. The properties of the elementary particles would arise from the shape properties of the extra dimensions. These would influence the type of oscillatory modes of the string, just as a musical instrument influences the sound it can produce. As a consequence of the work of John Schwarz, Michael Green, and Edward Witten at Princeton University, many physicists now believe that it is possible to explain the entire universe and the known interactions within the context of a new, so-called heterotic (or hybridized for vigor) string theory

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developed by the group known as "the Princeton string quartet," David Gross, Jeff Harvey, Emile Martinec, and Ryan Rohm. Perhaps most important of all, even more accurately than one can predict the beauty of the music from the Guarneri quartet, for example, the new superstring theory should allow physicists to calculate precisely its consequences. Moreover, just as one knows by the sound of the Guarneri's music without looking at the score that they are playing the piece the way it is meant to be played, contemporary physicists have faith that we will also know the correct theory by its internal consistency and beauty. Several groups are currently directing their research toward the reformulation of string theory in a more elegant version. However, unless we can calculate quantities which can be measured in the laboratory, the theory remains in the realm of mathematical metaphysics.

In addition to the curling up of the extra dimensions, the new candidate for a unified theory of everything (with the often-used acronym TOE) predicts a structure of space-time that is radically new. Our understanding of the structure of space-time has long involved an evolution away from thinking of ourselves as the center of the universe. Copernicus made a revolutionary advance by stating that the earth is not at the center of the solar system. Then, in the twentieth century, the principle of relativity advanced our thought to the realization that there is no absolute frame of reference in the universe. The basic consequence of quantum mechanics is that the outcome of experiments are no longer determined absolutely, but only probabilistically, and therefore, the question of where something is can never be predicted with certainty.

The above brief historical evolution of human thought can be compared with the development of children's thought. There is also a process of learning of the limitations of the self as children learn that there exist other people with their own needs, other perspectives needing consideration, and uncertainty in day-to-day life. Piaget used very abstract principles with mathematical operations and symmetry to describe the structures existing in a child's mind that underlie his behavior. The child develops increasingly sophisticated operations until his mental logic works harmoniously with the logic of the world. The consideration of this type of logic brings us to our next point.

These advances in understanding all depend on the idea that the universe is made of points. In order for there to be a center, there must be a point which is central. Even a frame of reference is known

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since Descartes as a coordinate system made of points. The central new idea in string theories is that space-time may be made not of points but of loops or strings. Physics can be thought of as a symphonic creation of the oscillations of the strings. This would require a new type of geometry which I will call a geometry without points (rather than pointless geometry). Not without coincidence, geometry without points is at the heart of much of modern mathematics research, such as recent progress in the long-standing Fermat theorem in number theory. There is even hope among some researchers to use the principles of string theory to unify much of mathematics. In brief, geometry without points is an attempt to put our intuitive notion of geometry in a language general enough so that it can apply to situations one may not have heretofore thought to be geometrical, just as Piaget sought a new formal mathematical basis for his description of mental structures.

Physicists would like to see the harmony and logic of a theory by seeing the universe, as we know it, as a necessary consequence. One might say that the central question of physics is "Why is there something, rather than nothing?" In *Genesis*, we read that "In the beginning, the earth was without form and void and darkness was on the face of the deep" and then God said, "Let there be light!" A modern theoretical physicist is interested in what that mechanism is by which "something" in the form of coherent energy might appear out of a primeval chaos. One area of active research is that of quantum cosmology which attempts to understand the initial moments of the universe in terms of a scenario called "the inflationary big bang." This scenario is necessarily incomplete on a fundamental level. To truly understand the beginning of the universe, when all interactions are taking place at enormous energies and pressures, one must have a complete relativistic and quantum mechanical understanding of all interactions.

A fundamental theory of physics must have certain features constrained by the universe we observe. First, the universe is, over large distance scales, homogeneous and isotropic. That is, an observer from any point sees a universe more or less equivalent to that observed at any other point, and what he sees at any one point is more or less the same in any direction. Of course, on shorter scales there are inhomogeneities, such as our galaxy and the solar system. Second, the universe is seen to be expanding as observed from any point. The measurement that leads to this conclusion is very easy to understand. The frequency of light from stars is seen to be shifted,

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just as the pitch of a train whistle falls as the train recedes. The shift in the frequency of light, toward the red, is in a measure proportional to the distance, a fact known as Hubble's Law. Third, the universe is found to have a remnant of an explosion at the beginning of the universe, the big bang, that set off the expansion—a small but uniform background radiation, a noise underlying every human signal measuring 2.7 degrees above absolute zero.

This discussion recalls the challenge at the opening paragraph as well as related challenges. A major unanswered question is whether the mass of the universe is great enough that the force of gravity will eventually stop the expansion and cause a contraction resulting in a big crunch. The alternative is for the universe to continue expanding forever. One possibility, if the big crunch is our fate, is that we are a part of an infinite cycle of bangs and crunches. Another especially interesting idea, proposed by Ed Tryon of Hunter Colege, is that the universe is a state created out of nothing.

The evolution of the early universe, then, has been explained on a qualitative level by big bang cosmology, which supposes an initial explosion of a singular configuration signaling the beginning of the universe. We would like, though, to understand more specifically the formation of galaxies, the distribution of elements and the nature of the elementary particles in the universe. We are interested not only in why there is something rather than nothing, but also in why there is the specific something that we see around us. An idea that has been vital in our approach to this question, an idea that appears vital to much of physics, is that of symmetry.

Many problems that might at first seem intractable can be dealt with by making use of the available symmetry. For example, one might ask if there is a stable point for a marble on a merry-go-round. By symmetry, there can be only one possibility: the center. If the marble goes anywhere else, the configuration plus merry-go-round will change as the merry-go-round turns; the process of rotation does not leave the configuration invariant. If the marble is placed at the center, however, the configuration is left invariant by rotations. It therefore possesses rotational symmetry. That is to say, the invariance of the configuration under rotations implies a rotational symmetry. Symmetry considerations have reduced the calculation to a trivial observation.

The notion of symmetry is at the heart of many of the matters discussed here. It is crucial not only to the understanding of physical laws, but also to the philosophical setting we have suggested.

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Piaget's work can once again be used as a focal point. His theory of cognitive development is based upon internal mental structures which accommodate the observed world while assimilating external reality to the existing mental structures. While the theory's level of abstraction approaches that of theoretical physics, simplification again occurs as a result of the high level of symmetry. Symmetry considerations play an important role in the child's understanding of concepts like volume, number, logic, space or time. In a famous example, understanding the concept of volume means being able to compare the amount of water in a short fat cup with the same amount of water in a tall thin one. According to Piaget, a mature concept of volume is invariant under the distortions imposed by changes in physical shape. Within this new way of thinking about the problem, one should replace the notion of a concept or of an object by the symmetry associated with it. This conceptual framework also sheds light on the concept of a geometry without points. The usual notion of a space and time made of points is replaced by the invariants (like rotation) of the loops or strings in space and time. The search for all the invariants of string theory has been one direction for new formulations of string theory.

Equally important in theoretical physics is the concept of symmetry breaking. As an example, consider the places one sets for a circular dining table. If the set table is going to be symmetric, one can place all the knives on the left of the plates or on the right. However, once a choice is made for one setting, that determines the side for all the other settings. Neglecting consideration of etiquette, both choices are equal. One might say that the laws of table setting (neglecting etiquette) have a left-right symmetry (what's called a mirror or parity symmetry), yet the actual physical setting requires a choice which irrevocably breaks this symmetry for the table.

The equations of physics also have certain symmetries. Some of these reflect symmetries that are actually observed in the universe, such as light. Light is associated with the electromagnetic interaction characterized by a fundamental symmetry of the universe, that resulting from the conservation of charge. Therefore, the conservation of charge carried by a current in a battery is a consequence of the existence of an electromagnetic symmetry. However, some of the symmetries of the equations of physics are, in fact, not symmetries of the observed universe, much as the mirror symmetry of the table was not a symmetry of the setting. One example of this is mirror symmetry in nature. It is observed that the results of certain

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experiments involving a subnuclear interaction, called the weak interaction, are not invariant under a change in the apparatus made by a mirror reflection.

Essential to our understanding of the early universe is a transition from a phase of greater symmetry to one of lesser symmetry. This is part of the mechanism of the appearance of light from the chaotic primeval void. The idea can be compared to the change from clear water to translucent ice as it is cooled, and the consequent changes in the structure of the molecules of H_20.

Water has the greatest symmetry, being invariant under rotation and translation. It is a fluid that takes the shape of the vessel that contains it. Ice, in contrast, is a crystalline solid that is not completely invariant under rotation or translationally invariant. It has specific lines and direction of symmetry. The change of phase, from water to ice, breaks most of the symmetry of water. Within this context, the question of "Why do we have the specific something we observe?" can be refined to the mathematically precise questions of "What are the symmetries and broken symmetries we observe in nature and why do we exist in the phase characterized by such symmetries?" Moreover, the nature of the phase transition is interesting. In the inflationary, big-bang, scenario, the phase transition can be compared to what happens to water placed in the freezer. Of course the water slowly cools down. However, sometimes, if the cooling is suitably slow and undisturbed, the liquid will remain a supercooled liquid until the freezer is opened. At this point one can hear the ice crackle as it forms. Of course, the quality of the ice one obtains in this way is quite variable. This brings us to another important question, "How does the phase transition to a universe of lesser symmetry have a structure of space-time consistent with the continuum we observe?" In a qualitative sense, a child's increasing understanding can also sometimes be precipitated by a sudden change like that in a phase transition.

The phase of lesser symmetry we actually observe must include the four known physical interactions of electromagnetism, the weak and strong subnuclear interactions, and gravity. The fundamental theory must also explain naturally our existence in three space- and one time-dimensions. The way in which physical laws may be unified is exemplified by the theory of electromagnetism. Electricity and magnetism seem like two different forces, yet only one set of equations is needed to describe both phenomena; each force is a

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manifestation of the other. Symmetry considerations allow us to view one set of events in different ways. Consider a moving charge, for example, a current through a wire. The moving charge creates a magnetic field perpendicular to the wire. Moreover, if one moves a bar magnet through a coil of wire, a current in the wire is created. In short, a changing electric field produces a magnetic field and a changing magnetic field produces an electric field. The principle of relativity allows one to view electric and magnetic fields as manifestations of a single phenomenon, the motion of a charge relative to some observer. Further unification of the electromagnetic interactions with the weak interactions can be made. Steven Weinberg, Abdus Salam, and Sheldon Glashow unified these forces using the idea of symmetry breaking explained earlier. These results were recently confirmed by Carlo Rubbia at CERN.

Quantum electrodynamics (QED) is an example of a theory that is relativistic and quantum mechanical with an unbroken symmetry; yet the theory is incomplete (over and above the fact that there are other interactions). Recall that after answering the question of what are the observed symmetries of an interaction, physicists want to calculate the consequences of the theory and compare them with experiment. Unless we can do this, the work remains within a solipsistic realm of philosophical speculation. Although we can calculate remarkably well within the realm of validity of quantum electrodynamics, in the realm where one can neglect the other interactions, infinities appear in intermediate stages of the calculation. These infinities are similar to what happens when a sound system gets noisier and noisier because of feedback. They are a distinctly quantum mechanical effect. There exists a self-consistent rule for handling these divergences, but most physicists feel that the divergences that appear are the first indications that a more sophisticated and comprehensive theory that contains quantum electrodynamics as a limit is needed. One of the strengths of string theory as a unifying theory is that it is believed to be such a finite theory. The unification of the weak and electromagnetic interactions can be thought of as the simplest way to begin to cure some of the infinities that arise in the coupling of nuclear matter to electromagnetism. However, this theory develops side effects as a result of the treatment. That string theory has fewer infinities than quantum electrodynamics is related to the fact that it is not based upon a geometry of points. The infinities that arise in QED occur when two particles, like electrons, which are pointlike in nature in QED, are

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found close together. These problems do not occur in string theory because particles have an entirely different origin, related not to points but to the oscillatory modes of the strings.

There are an enormous number of elementary particles that have been discovered in addition to the photons and electrons familiar from high-school physics. The discoveries have been made with the use of large machines, called accelerators, by colliding beams of particles bent by magnets. The bigger the accelerators, the deeper inside nature and the shorter the distance that the machine can probe. The particles can be classified according to the way they interact, their mass, their spin, and their other so-called quantum numbers. They display regularities when classified by certain symmetry schemes. However, the prediction of their existence, their properties and their behavior from first principles is an open problem. One can compare this problem to the state of chemistry before Mendeleev developed the periodic table of the elements. One could classify the elements according to the regularity of their behavior; however, nobody had an explanation from first principles, like the atomic theory, for these regularities. The existence of such unexplained experimental regularities is one indication that a branch of science is ripe for a new deductive approach with wide-ranging, perhaps revolutionary consequences. Physicists have searched for many years for the equivalent of the periodic table for electrons, neutrons and the many other particles observed in the laboratory. We already know that neutrons and protons are made of objects with the unusual name (derived from a Joycean line using the word for a German cheese) of quarks. One of the hopes for a fundamental theory of physics is that all of the other properties would be determined. Everyone would then be able to calculate the electron mass from some clear and simple rules. However, rather than a new general principle like string theory, it might be that new discoveries in larger machines are needed before physicists will understand these rules.

As we have stated before, string theory was first developed as a fundamental theory of strongly interacting hadrons, like the proton and neutron, with the observed spectrum of particles obtained as oscillatory modes of a string. However, one mode found in string theory was not observed as a hadron. This initial failure is what is now the most interesting aspect of string theory. The unobserved hadron is now considered to be the mediating particle for gravity. Gravity is the weakest of the four forces, making its presence felt

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over long distances, beyond the range of the subnuclear forces, and in regions where the electromagnetic forces have been essentially neutralized. It is the force we are most familiar with through its effects in our everyday lives. However, extrapolation of our knowledge of gravity into realms like the beginning of the universe has proved to be one of the greatest challenges of the twentieth century. If one tries to formulate gravity as a quantum theory interacting with pointlike particles of matter, one encounters infinities for which there is no cure. Unlike QED, whose finite number of infinities still permit calculations in a self-consistent manner, quantum gravity is plagued with an infinity of infinities with no predictive calculational power. It is, therefore, virtually useless as a physical theory. Something more fundamental is needed to cure the proliferation of infinities. String theory is so far the only candidate.

What then is the string theory, the candidate for a fundamental theory of all interactions? On the one hand, it can be scientifically formulated as a teleological principle, although the reason for the power of this principle is not yet evident. The principle gives an indication of the abstraction necessary for string theory. One can classically describe the motion of light in a medium, by saying that the photon minimizes the distance it travels. Light acts as if it knows where it is going, even though it is only obeying causal equations. Similarly, a string moving in space-time sweeps out an area which is classically minimized. Quantum mechanically, all possible world sheets (the regions swept out by the string) contribute to a physical process with the probability associated with each string depending upon the area of the sheet. Those with minimized area have the greatest weight. Points are replaced by lines and lines by areas, in the passage from the description of pointlike, quantum field theory (the form of quantum electrodynamics) to string theory.

On the other hand, one hopes that string theory is sufficiently constrained so that a unique consistent theory will appear, predicting the properties of all the known elementary particles. Unlike other sciences, there seem to be unique, consistent answers to fundamental problems in physics, and these answers seem to have a simplicity and elegance which draw researchers to them. Complicating this hope is the fact that, so far, consistent string theories have been formulated only in ten dimensions. Researchers of string theory have tried to turn this feature, at first blush a bit disappointing, into a virtue. Ten dimensions are not inconsistent with

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laboratory observation if the six extra dimensions beyond space and time are unobservable. In recent formulation of string theory, the extra dimensions are unobservable because they are smaller than any observable size, and their topological properties are responsible for the physical properties of the observed particles. Somehow, we feel that a deeper understanding of string theory will lead to a consistent formulation in four dimensions. For now, one should not lose sight that it is a possibly consistent and finite quantum theory of gravity that could include the other interactions known to man.

With that in mind, it is amusing to recall the immortal words of Sherlock Holmes, "When you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

By stretching the imagination, one can conclude by suggesting that the reconciliation of the two most important theories of modern physics within string theory suggests a Hegelian synthesis: gravity and quantum mechanics unified on a higher level using a quantum geometry of strings spinning in space. To return to where we began, with *Genesis*, another recent development in physics has led to a mathematical theory of chaos and turbulence. Perhaps the developments beyond the horizon will lead to an understanding of the formless void before the creation of light, whose dynamics lead to string theory.

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Roy Finch

ABEL AND STEINER

Lionel Abel, in his essay "So Who Is to Have the Last Word?" (*PR* 3, 1986), disagrees with George Steiner on two main points: *(1)*Abel does not accept Steiner's version of the Torah as a Derrida-like text; and *(2)*he has, instead, what Steiner does not have, faith in the State of Israel.

When we look at these disagreements more closely, we see that they are not as great as they appear, for, just as Steiner doesn't *really* believe in the Torah as the Supreme Text (but only as one more text), so Abel doesn't *really* accept the State of Israel as a Homeland (but only as a place to be emotionally attached to and perhaps to visit now and then). Yet behind this there is a profound difference of orientation which I propose to examine. (I will not be able to do this without expressing my own point of view, which is different from both of theirs and which I will state later.)

Abel is certainly right that the Torah as "text" is no "Homeland" and no religious authority either, and hence no foundation for any recognizable Judaism. But Steiner does not need or want a Homeland. His position has always been that Homelessness is the better state for Jews and that to be able to live without a Homeland (until the time of the Messiah) is their peculiar and special gift.

Faced with the actual choice of returning to Israel, a great many Jews have decided not to, for reasons which the Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua, along with others, has recently explored in depth in a volume entitled *Diaspora: Exile and the Contemporary Jewish Condition* (Harper and Row). In what sense then is it their Homeland? Perhaps they send money, or visit occasionally, or let their children work in a kibbutz, or write articles about it. Of course, the matter is more complicated. Yehoshua and his colleagues believe that American Jewish "leaders" wishing to help Israel are nevertheless causing serious damage by turning it into a superpower beyond its natural means. An unhealthy dependence has developed on both sides, and Israel is encouraged to undertake a global role, half on its own and half in what it believes to be American interests.

We do not know to what extent this reflects the "voice of the People," but what matters for Abel is that the existence of Israel as a Homeland for those who live there is the "voice of God" speaking as

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the "voice of the People." Israel is democratically-religiously justified.

It is a justification which becomes problematic when we look at the actual situation. Which People? The million Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza? The exclusively Christian Arab population of Nazareth? The many religions in Jerusalem? It is, as Steiner says, all mixed up with force and guns. Perhaps the voice of the People can be heard, perhaps not. But at any rate the state *exists*, and there is enough democracy in it to satisfy Abel.

Holding onto the "text" of the Torah, Steiner would have *this* at least if Israel should fail—a collection of "meanings" in these books, even if no great Truth. But if it does fail, Abel, so he seems to believe, would have nothing left as Jew at all:

> If the establishment of Israel is in any sense unreal, or just temporary, if it can be truly said to be spurious, then too I think that Hitler has had "the last word" against us.

Is Israel a "false Messiah" or "fake Zion," as communism proved to be for an earlier generation of so many Jews and others? Are Jews deceiving themselves about this State, said to be now the sixth most powerful military nation on earth (some say the fourth most powerful)?

Abel chooses not to understand Steiner's warning that Israel is "a nation-state to the utmost degree." What Steiner means is that it is a religious or quasi-religious nation-state of great antiquity with nationalist feelings and ambitions. (If the United States were, in a civil sense, a Christian state to the degree that Israel is a Jewish state, many Jews would refuse to live here.) Is Abel deceiving himself about this? Does he think that Israel is a pluralistic society? Or that it will become one in the future? What happens when the facts begin to conflict with this?

Abel rightly points out that the Hitler of Steiner's *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.* mistakenly attributes the State of Israel to the Holocaust:

> But the State of Israel was not provided by the Holocaust. It was provided by Jews responding to the Holocaust, and if they had not provided themselves and their descendents with the State of Israel, they would have been totally defeated by the Fuehrer.

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Like the Phoenix, Israel rose from the ashes, more a miracle than a calculation. But at the same time this would not have been possible without the assistance of Europeans and Americans, recoiling from the horrors of the Holocaust. Contrary to fundamentalism and Messianic Zionism, there is nothing here which should be "sacralized." For its own sake Israel should be criticized, not "sacralized." (In a political context "sacralizing" runs more than the risk of "totalitarianizing.")

What about Steiner's Hitler novel now, which called forth Lionel Abel's comments, and particularly the last few pages in which Hitler is allowed to express his attitude toward the Jews? He claims to have learned his basic idea from them and also attributes to them the perversion of Western civilization.

It is not conceivable that these views about Western history, which are put into the mouth of Hitler, could be also Steiner's views, for they are blatantly and grossly false. But it *is* conceivable that, by not providing any answer to Hitler, Steiner is saying that Jews may not yet have found a convincing answer. In a phrase more Steiner than Hitler, the Fuehrer describes the Nazi Master Race as a "parody—a hungry imitation" of the Jewish idea of the Chosen People. This connection is not made gratuitously. Fifty years before Hitler, Dostoevsky, in one of the anti-Semitic entries in *Diary of a Writer*, had said that there is no room in the world for more than one Chosen People at a time.

Steiner's Hitler goes on then to lump together, as of Jewish inspiration or invention (almost, he suggests, conspiracy), the teaching of Jesus Christ and the communism of Karl Marx. This is the kind of anti-Semitic ranting in which Hitler did indeed indulge, but we do not believe that Steiner would. Steiner knows very well the Hellenic aspect of Christian teaching present in the Gospels themselves (which, after all, were written in Greek), and he also knows the anti-Semitism of Karl Marx, who had no love or use for the Jewish People. In these ravings we have Hitler's Big Lie, certainly not Steiner's Truth. Why does not Steiner try to straighten this out? Perhaps because he despairs of correcting such a powerful myth.

Does Abel have a "stronger myth"? Is it the myth of Israel as the "voice of God," as he says, "shouted in the streets"? But he doesn't believe that this *is* a myth. He is, I think, talking about the *real* Israel, created by the "voice of the People" as the "voice of God." This, it seems, settles the matter for the Jews who live there:

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> So for them the matter is settled. But for George Steiner it is not. The voice of God for him cannot be heard in "Long Live Israel," shouted by Jews.

Steiner's caution about "shouting in the streets" is well-advised. We recall the Nazis shouting in the streets. And Jews recently shouting "Long live King Sharon," referring to the General who invaded Lebanon. And shouting in the streets in various fascist countries, for example in Latin America. It is not a question of Steiner holding out for Truth with a capital *T*, as Abel suggests. It is a question of his remembering the crimes committed in the name of the People. Abel knows this too. He is no defender of militarism or fascism. And I doubt that he would shut his eyes to fascism in Israel. But is his confidence in Israel a religious belief? Or is it conditional?

Is Steiner "waiting for Truth"? Or is he warning us against the greatest evil of our time: militarism and nationalism and their deadly combination? And does he see these dangers as even greater for Israel because of its tendency to funnel religious emotions into nationalism? Is it not precisely this combination of religion and politics against which the best Jewish thinkers warned (Magnes, Buber, Scholem, Breuer, Kohn and Gutkind, to name a few)? Did not Scholem understand, from his monumental study of the Sabbati Zevi movement, just how dangerous this was?

Israel was founded as a secular state, yet by a People whose history has not been secular, but quite the reverse, permeated by an almost too literal Messianism. Hence Israel may not be playing the "game of the nations," but the far too committed "game of Zion" in which "zealotry," "impossiblism" and "forcing God" may again prove irresistible as they did in Roman times. The danger of fundamentalism and apocalypticism (sacralizing current events) is that this tends to release forces of tradition and destiny which then proceed with a momentum of their own. We have seen it happen already in this century with the totalitarian "sleepwalkers," and we have not seen the end of it.

* * *

Is there a demonic element in Judaism analagous to the demonic element in the Christian Church? Does it have to do with the same confusion between worldly power and religion? Is it an attempt to wrest power from God (faith, tradition, prophecy) for the "national soul" as Christians attempted to do for the Church?

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When the People-soul tries to live without the discipline of the Law and only for national power, what are the consequences? In Biblical times the prophets spoke of pursuing "false gods." Today there is no greater "false god" than the nation-state, particularly the militaristic nation-state.

The "voice of the People" was repeatedly in the Bible *not* the "voice of God." In ancient times the Jews were not immune to the idolatry of national power, the *hubris* of the collective ego. At the opposite extreme during the last two millenia they experienced what they could understand as the Divine Wrath, producing the extraordinary courage of submissiveness and martyrdom. The national psyche has been strung between these two extremes, rather like the son of a too-powerful Father, alternating between excessive submissiveness and excessive self-assertion.

Hitlerism may be described as "pure demonism," a "national soul" claiming complete autonomy and freedom from ethical restraint, to the extent of taking upon itself even the power to determine what is human and what is not. In the absence of a *given* humanity, a genuinely religious humanism, nothing stood in the way of this.

Steiner's novel captures the horrors of the Hitler demonism through its setting in the South American jungles where, in this vision, human life is swamped by biological forces. Here everything human is lost in malignant growth, death and decay. It is the extremism of the jungle in contrast to the extremism of the desert, where all that is merely human is burned up by the purifying sun. Steiner's jungle is the world of terror and darkness, not darkness as the comforting feminine night, but Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*.

Lionel Abel (who tells us in one of his essays that his father was a Reform rabbi, from whose views he separated himself early in life) keeps his distance from such speculations, as the ancient Confucian scholars kept their distance from the dizzying Buddhist flights into Nothingness, or the French *philosophes* from the murky waters of theosophism. Lionel Abel, mercifully, is a man of reason, rather than of miracles and authority, and does not set much store by demons and hell.

Nevertheless Hitler existed; Buchenwald existed; scientific extermination of human beings exists. (A Jewish writer has recently said that Jewish suffering is different from other suffering, and we see what he means. But is Black suffering different from other suffering? Is children's suffering? Or the suffering of the blind, the dis-

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abled, the afflicted?) Even Nietzsche, who warned of what was in store with the advent of "nihilism," caught only the barest flashes of the coming of Hitler and the actuality of total dehumanizing torture and death.

* * *

Is Israel now the answer for Jews? Or is Israel to be the place where hostilities between Jews break out into the open again? Or is there perhaps no answer any longer for Jews as Jews, or for Christians as Christians, but only for both as human beings? Is this what the eruption of the Hitler hell really signifies? The extermination factories in which people were treated as vermin—do they not silently attest that Jews as Jews and Christians as Christians do not matter now, but only both of them as human beings?

It was a natural reaction in Buchenwald, Auschwitz, Dachau and the other camps, the survivors say, to think: "This *can't* be happening" (even as it was happening); "*Humanity won't let it happen.*" But *there was no humanity*, internally or externally, between the killers and the victims, or between the camps and those outside who knew, and did nothing. The shock does not wear off; where we had imagined there was something, there was nothing.

Is there a similar situation now with regard to the nuclear holocaust? We think: "There won't be any nuclear holocaust. Humanity will not allow it." But the truth is: *There is no humanity.*

What we have to begin to comprehend is this: that humanity as such has never mattered in Christianity, Islam or Judaism. They each claimed the right to define humanity for themselves against each other and against "pagans" and "heathens." But it was not this *defined* humanity which was stripped away in the death camps. It was not *Jewish* humanity or *Christian* humanity or *Islamic* humanity which was reviled and spat upon; it was just ordinary humanity. And this is what no one was prepared for. *Because* these people were Jews or Gypsies or Jehovah's Witnesses or Communists, their common humanity was cancelled. The crime was against what united them to the human race, what had been taken for granted, but which none of the Western religions had ever spoken up for. In other words, *it was against something which neither Christianity nor Islam nor Judaism has ever been prepared to admit existed.*

The astounding thing about the Holocaust, therefore, is that what was done to the Jews and others is something which the Biblical religions had no basis for even imagining. This is because humanity (the bond between human beings as such with no further

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qualifications) has from the start never had any theological standing in any of these religions. Small wonder that, when the time came, a brutal racialism in a so-called Christian country could violate the common humanity which none of the monotheistic religions had ever recognized.

What about the "universalism" of the teaching of the Prophets and the Gospels? Do we forget that the religions always maintained that *first* the rest of the world must accept Jesus Christ or the People of Israel or the Revelation of Islam *before* entering into one or the other of these "universalisms"? None of these religions ever shared their chosenness or election except on these conditions. *Never* was it maintained that humanity, without qualification or reservation, came first. And so inured are we to this way of thinking that even now it scarcely strikes us as the inhuman mind-freezing which it is. We always talked about human beings who were Christians, Muslims or Jews *first* and so necessarily in implacable hostility to each other. This is the still unacknowledged original crime against humanity.

All these years, but most of all recently in the century of Hitler and Stalin, we have been told that humanity is an abstraction. How close we are to Hitler and Stalin that now we agree with this! But there is a different and opposite lesson to be learned from the Holocaust: *Humanity was no abstraction in the death camps*. It was the most real fact of all just because it was so overwhelmingly not present. Does its absence show that it is not real? On the contrary, we saw what "acts of humanity" really were when they took place (so rarely, so impossibly) under these circumstances. It might even occur to us that they were what was most "concrete" (along with the death and destruction), while the Germanism and the Judaism and the Christianity were the "abstractions."

The victims have said it plainly enough: Humanness is what was deliberately excluded from the extermination program. Every last vestige of it was driven out. We who read and talk about this see remotely what was proved in agony and abandonment: how fragile, how essential, how incalculably precious is human feeling, the human bond, and what happens when it is systematically, deliberately and down to the last detail nullified. Whatever we may say about the Biblical God (whether he was present in the camps or present only in His negation), the God whose absence mattered was the God of humanity, the God we haven't found yet.

In Dachau, Auschwitz and Buchenwald, in their last extremities, humanity was *all* that mattered, *all* that anyone asked for,

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all that the world needed. Millenia of *intolerance on principle* ended in this: that the human bond is the most precious thing that we have on this earth, more precious than all the religions put together. And if we had to choose between the religions and this (which we do not) we should let the religions go. It doesn't make any difference *who* says this. The death camps say it, and their authority outweighs all else.

Hitler was the Angel of Death, identified by Christians with both Satan and the Antichrist. The dehumanized total death which he brought, severing human beings from every relation to fellow humans, is the culmination of centuries of intolerance and hatred, evoking a result even more negative. Only the God of humanity can bring the nightmare to a close: the long night of Christian persecution of Jews and other Christians, the old and still continuing hostility between Christians and Muslims, the ever growing bitterness and terror between Jews and Muslims, the ancient drawn-out condescension and contempt cast on the great spiritual traditions labelled *pagan* and *heathen*.

There *is* a meaning to Dachau, Auschwitz, Buchenwald and the other camps. And everyone knows what it is (though we are not sure whether the present generation can *say* it). It is that nothing comes before humanity (and this means ordinary given humanity, not traditionally and exclusively defined humanity). Nothing comes before humanity in its fullness and greatness. Neither Judaism, nor Christianity, nor Islam, nor communism, nor God, nor Christ, nor Buddha, nor Torah, nor Israel, nor Germany, nor Europe, nor America, nor Truth, nor Reason, nor Revelation. . . . But humanity does not exist yet. It has to be *made*, and it has to be made as actually and concretely as the death camps were actual and concrete. Even more so. There is no other answer. And we do not have much time.

Lionel Abel Replies

What surprises me about Professor Finch's communication is his conviction—to me so odd—that he is right. I cannot help noting that he contradicts himself right off—in his first three

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sentences. First he writes that my disagreements with George Steiner "are not as great as they appear," and then that behind them "there is a profound difference of orientation." Shouldn't Professor Finch resolve his disagreement with his own judgement before taking issue with mine?

And do I have to prove to a professor of philosophy that two and two make four? Had any group genuinely representing humanity offered its aid to the Jewish concentration camp survivors after the war, I think most Jews would have been glad to be served by it, and many might have preferred to be so aided, rather than struggle for Palestine. But the humanity Professor Finch assumes is more than a word said not even one word to the camp survivors. The humane feelings expressed by individuals or groups at special and transient moments, is about all we can really be singling out when we use the word "humanity." We may even assume there is such an entity, but we cannot assume that it has any particular power. Humanism, a creed Professor Finch evidently prefers to Judaism and Christianity, rests on these religious beliefs, and without their support is soon transformed into nihilism.

There was some point in opposing nationalism when there was an internationalism one could support; I have in mind not some agreeable current of opinion, but actual political entities, capable of bringing people into the streets shouting slogans. I have in mind the Second and the Third Internationals. These really existed. But as we saw, when the crunch came, the Second International divided itself along nationalist lines, and the Third International became the foreign policy instrument of Soviet Russia. Does Professor Finch think there is some Fourth International, an "International of Good Men," to use the phrase of Isaac Babel, which he and I could join?

And I do not agree that nationalism and militarism are the evils of our time. Hannah Arendt, with whom I often disagreed on other matters, thought the evil of our times was totalitarianism, which Professor Finch does not even mention. But let us say there are many evils. I submit that nationalism is not one of them. Nationalism and military valor saved the British Isles from Hitlerism. Nationalism, allied with Catholicism, has saved the Poles from the worst kind of Stalinism. And nationalism, allied with the Mohammedan faith, has saved the Afghans from enslavement to the Soviet machine.

About "shouting in the streets." The Palestinians do not shout in the streets. They explode, in buses, on planes, and in shopping

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malls. Yes, the Nazis shouted in the streets, and by outshouting—also outfighting—the Communists and Socialists, won the right—which they terribly abused—to represent Germany. But undeniably they won that right. And partly by shouting.

Finally, Professor Finch thinks that if Israel fails—it seems to me he thinks it has already failed—George Steiner will as least have the Torah, while I, according to my own words, will have nothing. So Steiner is in some way better off than I am. Perhaps. But here I am not going to soften or dilute my thinking. If Israel fails, the very phrase "better off" will be empty of meaning. Hitler, as I wrote, will have had the last word. But perhaps Professor Finch did not get my meaning. I will spell it out for him. Every tragedy, we are told, has to end with a moment of reconciliation. After the tragedy of the Holocaust, Jews were reconciled to living by the state of Israel. Let that be erased, and we would be back with the Holocaust in all its horror, and the Torah, even if not reduced to word games, *à la* Steiner, would hardly have the powers to give our lives back to us. We have not forgotten what we lost.

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Tom Clark

"STALIN AS LINGUIST"

"To write poetry now, even on current events, means to withdraw into the ivory tower. It's as though one were practicing the art of filigree. There is something eccentric, cranky, obtuse about it. Such poetry is like the castaway's note in the bottle."

Though it's been almost forty-five years since Bertolt Brecht made that statement, it has never been more applicable than at present; poets have never seemed more "eccentric, cranky, obtuse," their poems never fuller of the consummate irrelevance implied by Brecht's phrase, "the art of filigree." In what is obviously an extremely fragmented time for society at large as well as for the special interests of literature, the arts have entered a phase of extreme "pluralization"—as Ron Silliman, editor of the new "language poetry" anthology, *In The American Tree*,[1] calls it. All thoughts of truth or beauty or *quality* in writing are to be considered either nostalgic or plain reactionary, or so Silliman implies. "Any debate over who is, or is not a better writer," he decrees in his introduction, "is, for the most part, a surrogate social struggle."

The guidebooks to this brave new world beyond the who's-a-better-writer debate are starting to roll off not only the small presses—among which the "language" movement has already implanted itself—but those of some of America's universities as well. In recent years Southern Illinois University Press has issued some of the principal documents of this movement, including Barrett Watten's volume of critical essays (*Total Syntax*) and Bob Perelman's collection of those shadowboxing, self-qualifying "talks" which are this group's dominant mode of production (*Writing/Talks*). Now, from the University of Maine's National Poetry Foundation, comes this six-hundred-odd-page blockbuster anthology, a volume that registers the movement's literary performance to date.

The "language school," as this group is often called (in honor of L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E, a magazine Silliman terms "the first American journal of poetics by and for poets"), has its stronghold in

1. *In The American Tree*, edited by Ron Silliman. National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine at Orono, Maine.

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the San Francisco Bay Area, where its major movers (including Watten, Silliman, Perelman, and Lyn Hejinian) are based. There is also a New York branch, whose most prominent poet is Charles Bernstein. While there is a certain diversity of style among all these writers *as* writers, they display a surprising unanimity of purpose as evidenced in the critical writings and statements which take up a good one-third of *In The American Tree*. As avant-garde movements go, this one has exhibited a rare degree of cohesiveness (if not coherence). Silliman, in his introduction, traces the beginnings of the movement back to 1971, when Watten, as cofounder with Robert Grenier of *This* magazine, proclaimed a departure from the "speech-based poetics" of William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, and suggested a move toward a new, "non-referential" procedure, which would build poems not from "images, not voice, not characters or plot," [but] "only through the invocation of a specific medium, language itself." This anthology, Silliman says, "documents what became of that suggestion."

This new non-referential "axis" (as Silliman calls it) proposed a "public discourse on poetics" to replace the disorder and confusion of avant-garde poetic generations immediately prior to it—the Beats, the Black Mountain "projectivists," the New York School. All of those were represented in Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* (1960), and Silliman draws a bead on that anthology here, as though it were a principal obstacle in the path of his movement. According to him, there was one major problem with all of them: their failure to produce enough "criticism."

The language school writers will never be guilty of *that*. They are as long on critical theory as they are (relatively, and I think also absolutely) short on poems. Their criticism is mostly written in a pretentious intellectual *argot* that sounds a little like an assistant professor who took a wrong turn on the way to the Derrida Cookout and ended up at the poetry reading. What poetry they do write is mostly an odd alloy of the methodology of all that critical prose and the models of their "disorderly" literary predecessors. The voices of Creeley and John Ashbery, to name two powerful influences, are clearly audible in the background of some of the better poems here—Creeley behind Robert Grenier's, say, and Ashbery behind Charles Bernstein's. Another kind of voice, more constructivist than expressionist in its origins, can be heard in the work of Watten and Silliman, who base their writings on programmatic principles of composition. But the poets in all these strains share a reflexive qual-

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ity, and their work has a tendency to talk about itself, sometimes in a language reminiscent of technical manuals, as in Watten's poem "Position":

The apex settles on

Tones in surrounding heads.
A test case, or
exile. No wires account for
failure of specific response.
A triangle gives,
circles branch out. Forced

Exposure to limit distorts . . . .

Watten's critical prose, also amply represented here, deploys the same kind of institutional-gray vocabulary to only slightly different ends. In his prose Watten seems to owe a debt to the distancing and disjunction methods of the Russian Formalists, especially Viktor Shklovsky. His interest in Shklovsky reflects the leftist stance that's common among language school writers. One critic, Fred Pollack, has suggested that "language-school leftism is either stupid or disingenuous, the icing on a cake only bourgeois intellectuals can afford." Indeed, solidarity among the language school cadres is expressed not in bomb-throwing or plotting the overthrow of the state but in tactics like letter-writing campaigns, such as the one Watten orchestrated when I criticized his work in *Poetry Flash* recently.

To give some background: My first foray into criticism of the language school was in a January 1985 San Francisco *Chronicle* review of Watten's *Total Syntax*, wherein I took issue with, among other things, his terminology (Watten seems unable to get to the end of a sentence without tripping over an "obscured referent" or "grammatical completion'' along the way), and suggested such writing was ''the kind of mumbo jumbo you'd hear from a guy who stumbled into a linguistics lecture one day, and walked out an instant expert the next." The *Chronicle* received a storm of angry letters from Watten's allies, including one from his erstwhile Ph.D. adviser, who called me a "reactionary frump." That same letter-writer, a well-known University of California linguistics professor named George Lakoff, also produced an article later the same year for the local poetry periodical *Poetry Flash*. Titled "On Whose Authority?", the article's central point was that "language" writers had seized back

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(from "outside" critics) the "authority" to "characterize" their own work (in their "talks," statements, manifestoes, etc.). To Lakoff these writers were acting not like your average yuppified literary careerists (whom they resembled to some "outsiders") but like revolutionary "workers" who'd "taken over the factory."

Anyway, the editors of *Poetry Flash* must have felt a little anxious about Lakoff's article, because they asked me to write a response. (This assignment, Watten later suggested, amounted to my being "used" as a "bad-guy figure" by the devious and cunning *Flash* editors.) My response was called "Stalin As Linguist." The title was taken from a passage in Watten's poem, "Progress." The passage read: "One way contradictory use is to / Specify empty. / Basis, its / Cover operates under insist on, / Delineate. Stalin as a linguist . . . ". The title probably caused as much furor as the article itself.

Watten reacted by composing a two-page, single-spaced, indignant, "not-for-publication" communiqué to *Poetry Flash*. The letter demanded redress of grievances and threatened a boycott by advertisers. Attached was a list of people to receive copies. The list was almost as long as the letter itself. It contained the names of language school sympathizers with influential positions—institutional poetry administrators, reading coordinators, publishers, book distributors, bookstore owners and employees, university teachers, gallery representatives, etc. From these people and from others in the language school's local rank and file, *Poetry Flash* received a flood of letters. A selection appeared in subsequent issues of the paper. Several correspondents, such as Robert Gluck of the San Francisco State Poetry Center, charged me with "red-baiting." Joe McCarthy was evoked more than once, as were the "mau-maus" (by Silliman, though that letter never made it into print).

All of this suggests that despite its dedication to the *ideal* of criticism as equal in importance to creative work, the language school has a very thin skin when it comes to *taking* criticism. In the minds of Watten and other theorists of this movement—or at least in their pronunciamentos—the movement itself is nothing less than a forward surge of the great Hegelian dialectic of history. Any "outside" critic is forced into the role of reactionary. Hence the outraged tone of their plaints about "language-bashing." "Attacks have been made on this writing," Silliman says in his introduction. "No other current poetic tendency in America has been subjected to anything

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like the constant flow of dismissals and exposes [sic], many of them composed in the threatened rhetoric of fury, as have the poets here."

Silliman attributes such "dismissals" and "exposes" to the anachronistic persistence of "a simple ego psychology" dependent on such outmoded bourgeois values as "communication" and "emotion"—thus setting the state for a familiar language school morality play: persecution and martyrdom at the hands of the right wing. Shortly after my *Poetry Flash* article appeared, a former director of the San Francisco State Poetry Center (this fellow made a name for himself locally by staging language school events) sent me a postcard with an x-rated cartoon on the front and a message that charged me, in no uncertain terms, with being "right in there weenie-to-weenie with Reagan and the Pope safeguarding those Western Judeo-Christian verities," and even of being in the "pay" of "the Vatican"!

It's been pointed out more than once that the tyranny of method over material in the language writers' work and of group unanimity over individual variation in their political strategizing add up to the very thing they pretend to abhor most, a sad authoritarianism. But who or what is on the left and who or what on the right? In the administered world of the present, as Theodor Adorno has said, "all works of art including radical ones have a conservative image, for they help reinforce the existence of a separate domain of spirit and culture whose practical impotence and complicity with the principle of unmitigated disaster are painfully evident." The phrase "including radical ones" points up the meaninglessness of current "left" vs. "right" arguments on aesthetic issues.

These writers' claim to social value is not that they are building a discourse but breaking one down. They have informed us repeatedly that they are ''de-constructing'' language, ''defamiliarizing'' it, even (as one ''language'' writer, David Melnick, has put it) ''re-claiming the American language from the trash heap.'' If the corporate world and the media have given us an objectionable jargon, what the language school has managed to do isn't to deconstruct that jargon, but to substitute another jargon for it—one that's every bit as impenetrable by common sense. Much of their new anthology's critical prose is written in it (see Steve Benson's essay ''For Change,'' with its anti-''outsider'' rhetoric and smug insistence on the mechanical competency of his friends' writing: ''apparent units within their works often function by apparently non-

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programmatic and yet highly intentional juxtapositions . . . "). Unfortunately, the jargon also leaks over into the poetry, which comes out sounding a little like the drone of Hal the Computer in *2001*.

These writers have indeed, as Ron Silliman claims, rejected "speech" and thrown out the "speech-based" poetics of William Carlos Williams, but at what price? Williams's historic decision to base his writing on the spoken American language—paralleling Chaucer's decision to write in English instead of Latin or French, the "literary languages" of his time—was the great democratic gesture of poetry in this century, expanding its audience to fulfill the grandly inclusive aims of Walt Whitman. The language school has set out to draw back the perimeters of that audience, contracting poetry until it fits around only themselves.

Coming in

Partisan Review

- An Interview with William Phillips
- Arthur A. Cohen on Judaism and Modernism
- Poetry by Joseph Brodsky
- Pearl K. Bell on Kate Chopin and Sarah Orne Jewett
- Raymond Aron: *A Memoir*
- An Interview with Stephen Spender
- Nathan Glazer on Life in the Bronx
- Edith Kurzweil on Melanie Klein and Karen Horney
- Steven Marcus on Ernest Hemingway
- Barbara Probst Solomon on Marguerite Duras

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Carl Pletsch

FREUD'S "SPECIMEN DREAM"

Like nearly every great writer of the preceding century, Freud was consciously creating a mythical life of himself from an early age. This involved no particular duplicity, for he was living an "autobiographical life" for his own sake as much as for posterity—patterning his life upon the mythical biography of the Romantic genius in order to structure and enhance his own creative energies. Constructing his mythical life for himself as well as for his biographers and later generations, he was "writing" his autobiography in advance, as he lived it.

The mythic Freud has played as important a role as the scientific Freud in the psychoanalytic movement and twentieth-century intellectual life generally. In fact, it may be impossible to distinguish the mythic from the scientific Freud. Of course, it has been suggested that the myth of Freud as introspective genius detracts from Freud's credibility as a scientist and from the intellectual respectability of psychoanalysis. There is, however, nothing logically inconsistent or unscientific in a mythic aura surrounding the achievements of a scientific genius, except, perhaps, the concept of the genius itself. Virtually all the giants of modern science have been mythologized. Since the middle of the eighteenth century when the category of the genius was itself invented, mythologizing great scientists (as well as artists, political leaders and others) seems to have become almost automatic. The canonization of geniuses is a general feature of modern culture. The degree to which the myths of scientific hero-geniuses have been integrated into the practice of science has varied from one discipline to another. But for the practicing psychoanalyst, a personal relationship to Freud the scientific hero/genius seems inescapable. In fact, Freud may be the limiting case of the mythical hero in science.

What is there about Freud's achievement that makes some personal attitude toward him as the founding genius of psychoanalysis an inescapable dimension of this discipline? I believe that it stems from the fact that Freud united in a single activity the creation of a new discourse or science (psychoanalysis) and the excavation of his own personality. In his writings, Freud appears not only as the author, but often as the subject of investigation as well. His analysis

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of "the dream of Irma's injection" in the second chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* is a particularly good example, but there are many others. In such texts the myth of the scientist and the scientific achievement are substantially entwined.

Freud's revolutionary theory of the human personality and all his writing from *The Interpretation of Dreams* onward grew out of his discovery of some basic things about his own personality. These discoveries, made by 1900, are usually referred to as his "self-analysis." Freud reported on this fragmentarily in his published writings and in his correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess.

Freud never wrote a psychological profile of himself comparable to his case histories of patients like "Dora" or the "Wolf-man." On the contrary, his *Autobiographical Study* is one of the least revealing documents of its kind. He did, however, weave autobiographical hints into his other works in such a way as to provoke speculation about his personal history. And in the mythography of a genius, this impetus for the reader to speculate is more important than the putative facts of the hero's life.

It is well known, of course, that Freud was a private person, and reluctant to become the subject of a biography. Late in his life he fended off requests of several would-be biographers. In his remarks written for the acceptance of the Goethe Prize in 1930, he impugned the value of biography as a genre. And in earlier years he twice destroyed virtually all of his letters, diaries, and manuscripts. These gestures were not simply attempts to guard his privacy. A letter he wrote to his fiancée, Martha Bernays, in 1885, reveals other intentions.

> I have just carried out a resolution which one group of people, as yet unborn and fated to misfortune, will feel acutely. . . . They are my biographers. I have destroyed all my diaries of the past fourteen years, with letters, scientific notes and the manuscripts of my publications. . . . I cannot leave [Vienna] and cannot die before ridding myself of the disturbing thought of who might come by the old papers. Besides, everything that fell before the decisive break in my life, before our coming together [his engagement to Martha Bernays] and my choice of a calling [he had just decided to go to Paris to study with Charcot and pursue the elusive disorder known as hysteria], I have put behind me. . . . Let the biographers chafe. We won't make it too easy for them. Let each one of them believe he is right in his

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> "Conception of the Development of the Hero": even now I enjoy the thought of how they will all go astray.

Even allowing for a measure of irony, this letter indicates that—a full fifteen years before the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*—Freud was thinking about himself as the eventual subject of a biography, a scientific hero, a genius. But the date of the letter reveals more particularly that his concern with the way his life would be "read" was no afterthought. It was neither the controversial nature of his psychoanalytic discoveries nor his skepticism about biography that led him to guard against biographers. His preoccupation with "writing" his own life—as this letter to Martha shows—dates back at least to the time he struck out on the path that would lead to psychoanalysis. Indeed the impulse to control his own life-story is intertwined with the aspiration that took him to Paris. The desire to do something unique and original by his own design (to solve the mystery of hysteria) seems to have entailed the desire to be known as someone who was original, that is, to have the story of the genius told about himself.

Freud's destruction of so many biographical sources in 1885 was a public gesture designed to impose a silence that would stimulate biographical fantasy. But later, in making himself the paradigmatic case study of psychoanalysis, Freud had to supply certain positive hints about his (autobiographical) life. These are the anecdotes that, whether "true" or "fictional," provide for the trajectory of the mythical life. The anecdotes in which Freud inscribed his mythical life are not to be found in the obviously autobiographical writings—Freud's *History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* or the *Autobiographical Study*. They are more subtly encoded, for example, in his correspondence, written, as we know, with posterity in mind; in apparently incidental self-descriptions given in accounts of his work with patients such as "Dora," and in interpretations of his own dreams, such as the dream of Irma's injection in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This is the first and most commonly cited example of Freud's dream interpretation. It is commonly called "the specimen dream" of psychoanalysis, because Freud placed his analysis of it so prominently in the second chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, entitled "The Method of Interpreting Dreams: An Analysis of a Specimen Dream." It is usually treated as an actual dream, within a realist aesthetic. However, it is obviously not a dream, but a reconstituted

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dream-text, involving what (by an extension of Freud's vocabulary) might be called "tertiary revision."

Freud chose to illustrate his fundamental hypotheses in the second chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* with one of his own dreams. This was an unusual gesture in the scientific literature of the late nineteenth century. Consequently Freud's decision to use his own dream required a justification. He explains in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that he did not find suitable examples among the dreams of his patients. A critic might argue, he wrote, that the dreams of his patients "are the dreams of neuropaths, from which no valid inferences could be made as to the dreams of normal people." And Freud himself objected that "the subject to which these dreams of my patients lead up is always . . . the case history which underlies their neurosis." This meant that in each case he would have to explain the particular neurosis, thus distracting from the exposition of the main subject—the interpretation of dreams. So, Freud reasons, he has only his own dreams to work with. They provide him with an abundant choice of examples, "derived from an approximately normal person and relating to multifarious occasions of daily life."

Having defended his use of his own dreams in this way, however, Freud considers possible objections to the procedure. He mentions that his interpretations of his own dreams may seem untrustworthy. He appears to be referring to the inability of the reader to verify the record of the dreams or associations. He dismisses this objection, however, with the argument that *he* can be more sure of his observations of himself than he can of the self-observations of others.

Freud notes, however, that he is naturally hesitant to reveal the intimate details of his dreams. There can be no guarantee that others will not misinterpret his dreams once they are seen in print. He represents himself as anxious about his privacy and the loss of control over the interpretation of his dreams that is entailed in their publication. Yet he bravely declares that "it must be possible to overcome such hesitations," and goes on to quote the French psychologist Delboeuf to the effect that a psychologist is obliged to confess even his weaknesses if such confession will advance the cause of science. It is as if he has raised the objection in order to represent himself overcoming it. By calling attention to his resistance in this way, he could only enhance the reader's watchful curiosity about what the dreamer will reveal.

This effect is further enhanced by the interesting sentence with

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which he concludes the long paragraph justifying the use of his own dreams as examples: "It is safe to assume that my readers too will very soon find their initial interest in the indiscretions which I am bound to make replaced by an absorbing immersion in the psychological problems upon which they throw light." By the time he wrote this Freud certainly knew that precisely the opposite would be the case. His use of his own dreams as examples, and particularly the indiscretions entailed in analyzing them, would only stimulate the reader's curiosity about the author—just as in psychoanalysis every revelation made by the analyst stimulates the patient's fantasy. The statement must therefore be interpreted—as Freud interpreted many dream statements—as the contradiction of what it seems at first to indicate.

A remarkable sentence precedes the preamble and the dream-text. Freud announces abruptly, "Now I must ask the reader to make my interests his own for quite a while, and to plunge, along with me, into the minutest details of my life; for a transference of this kind is peremptorily demanded by our interest in the hidden meaning of dreams." At the time of writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, of course, Freud had not yet fully developed his notion of the transference; he uses the word in several different senses. But while neither the term *Uebertragung* nor the concept of transference figures very largely in the book, Freud uses it here in a provocative way that approaches its later meaning. The signaled transference suggests that the reader must enter into Freud's emotional life, even identify with him. Given Freud's interpretation of the dream of Irma's injection, this is an invitation to identify with the heroic explorer of the personality, the creator of psychoanalysis.

The "preamble" presents the background of the dream: Freud's partially successful treatment of a young woman well known to his family (Irma), and the mild reproach of a junior colleague (Otto), who apparently disapproved of Freud treating this patient psychoanalytically. According to the preamble:

> The patient was relieved of her hysterical anxiety but did not lose all her somatic symptoms. At that time [1895] I was not yet quite clear in my mind as to the criteria indicating that a hysterical case history was finally closed, and I proposed a solution to the patient which she seemed unwilling to accept.

Summer vacation interrupted the treatment at this point. Otto then paid Freud a visit after spending part of his vacation with Irma and

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her family at their summer resort. He reported that she was "better, but not quite well." Freud was vaguely aware of the reproof in Otto's words and so sat down that evening to write an account of Irma's case history, "in order," as he wrote, "to justify myself."

The preamble makes it clear, even before one reads the dream-text, that the dream concerns Freud's anxiety about treating patients in psychotherapy. In so doing, it alerts the reader to *one* of the dream's recurrent themes. But this is not its explicit function. Ostensibly it is designed to provide a necessary background to Freud's method of interpretation in order to prove that the dream is an expression of a wish. Could it be that Freud's anxiety is the latent meaning of the preamble? It is certainly the manifest content of the dream's interpretation.

The dream-text:

"Dream of July 23rd-24th, 1895"

A large hall—numerous guests, whom we were receiving—Among them was Irma. I at once took her on one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my "solution" yet. I said to her: "If you still get pains, it's really only your fault." She replied, "If you only knew what pains I've got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen—it's choking me"—I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy. I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble. I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of recalcitrance, like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that.—Then she opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modeled on the turbinal bones of the nose.—at once I called in Dr. M., and he repeated the examination and confirmed it. . . . Dr. M. looked quite different from usual; he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean-shaven. . . . My friend Otto was now standing beside her as well, and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: "She has a dull area low down on the left." He also indicated that a portion of the skin on the left shoulder was infiltrated (I noticed this, just as he did, in spite of her dress.). . . . M. said: "There's no doubt it's an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated." . . . We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my

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> friend Otto had given her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls. . . propionic acid. . . trimethylamin (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type). . . . Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly. . . . And probably the syringe had not been clean.

Immediately following the presentation of this dream-text, but before entering upon his detailed analysis, Freud notes that "it was immediately clear what events of the previous day provided its starting point." On the other hand, he asserts that "no one who had only read the preamble and the content of the dream itself could have the slightest notion of what the dream meant. I myself had no notion." He knows the starting point but has no notion of the dream's meaning. The rhetorical effect is to suspend the question, "What does the dream mean?" It underscores the necessity of methodical interpretation. But this question affects the reader doubly. It is a question about how this "specimen dream"—standing for dreams in general—is to be interpreted. But it also raises the question of what this particular dream means to Freud.

In Freud's detailed analysis there are many associations that do not contribute directly either to an understanding of his method or even to the myth of the heroic scientist; they do nonetheless further stimulate the reader's desire to know about Freud. The most important of these are the numerous allusions to sex and the possibility of a sexual attraction between the doctor and his patient. The allusions to sex constitute an agenda that might rival the one Freud chose to emphasize—his anxiety about doing psychotherapy. He intimates that it is such an agenda, but then suppresses it. First Freud notices that his encounter with Irma in the dream takes place at his wife's birthday party. Then he realizes that Irma looks like another woman of his acquaintance and recollects that "I had often played with the idea that she too might ask me to relieve her of her symptoms." When he arrives at the scenario in the dream where his friend Leopold is "percussing [Irma] through her bodice," and the dreamer notices the "dull area down low on the left," he remarks upon the phrase, "in spite of her dress." This detail raises the issue of the propriety of (male) physicians examining adult female patients, and whether women should be examined nude. However, just when the analysis of the dream veers toward the question of the physician's sexual interests, the text breaks off with the sentence, "Frankly, I had no desire to penetrate more deeply at this point."

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It is only in his associations with the chemical formula of trimethylamin near the end of the dream-text that Freud permits himself to arrive explicitly at the subject of sexuality, now calling it "the factor to which I attribute the greatest importance in the origin of the nervous disorders which it was my aim to cure [hysteria and obsessions]." And only here, at the end of his analysis of the dream, does Freud reveal that Irma and the other woman he would have preferred to have as his patient were both young widows. Here too, he suggests that Irma's friends would have liked to see her remarry. He intimates that the real cure for her hysteria would be sexual intercourse. This of course may be read in relation with Freud's earlier revelation that he had often played with the thought that the other woman might ask him to relieve her symptoms too. So the interpretation functions doubly with respect to the allusions to sex. While it serves to suppress sex as a theme of the dream that might rival the anxiety of practicing psychotherapy, it arouses the reader's curiosity about the author/dreamer's sexual interests. Perhaps by remaining inconclusive, it tempts the reader to interpret the sexual allusions further. It calls attention, however implicitly, to a hazard that the inventor of psychoanalysis had to overcome on his heroic journey: the temptation of becoming sexually interested in (or frightened by) his female patients.

Freud pursues his anxiety about being responsible for Irma's enduring symptoms more assiduously than the allusions to sexuality. In the dream-text itself he blames Irma for not accepting his explanation of the source of her hysterical symptoms: "If you still get pains, it's really your own fault." In the interpretation, however, he notices that this remark to Irma "showed that I was especially anxious not to be responsible for the pains which she still had. If they were her fault they could not be mine. Could it be that the purpose of the dream lay in this direction?" In fact, from this early point on in his analysis, Freud treats this anxiety as the dream's central theme, thereby making a conscious choice to highlight one agenda of the dream at the expense of others. We have already seen how a sexual interpretation is given over to the reader's fantasy. (Another important interpretive narrative involving Freud's friend Wilhelm Fliess was uncovered by Max Schur in *Freud Living and Dying*. And a dimension of the dream motivated by the pregnancy of Freud's wife Martha was so obscure that it has been written about only by Kurt Eissler in *American Imago*, 1985.

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So Freud's narrative is selective, as every narrative must be. But what were the principles of selection? Of course one was didactic—to select what would best convey his thesis about dreams being the expressions of wishes. But treating his anxiety about Irma's persisting symptoms as the motive of the dream permitted Freud to make his own journey in discovering psychotherapy to be the narrative theme of his interpretation. On the first page of the interpretation, Freud comments upon how the dream blames Irma for her symptoms, and notes that:

> It was my view at that time (though I have since recognized it as a wrong one) that my task was fulfilled when I had informed a patient of the hidden meaning of his symptoms: I considered that I was not responsible for whether he accepted the solution or not—though this was what success depended on. I owe it to this mistake, which I have now fortunately corrected, that my life was made easier at a time when, in spite of all my inevitable ignorance, I was expected to produce therapeutic successes.

This provides a plot to Freud's career as an investigator—creating a story of the hero correcting early mistakes made in ignorance. It suggests, furthermore, that his ignorance and therapeutic failures had the constructive function of permitting him to persist in pursuit of the solution to the riddle of hysteria.

The dream-text announces that the dreamer was "alarmed at the idea that [he] had missed an organic illness." This, he notes, "is a perpetual source of anxiety to a specialist whose practice is almost limited to neurotic patients and who is in the habit of attributing to hysteria a great number of symptoms which other physicians treat as organic." At that time, of course, and in 1895 when he dreamed the dream, Freud was practicing a wholly unorthodox and unrecognized therapy. It is safe to say that he was the *only* specialist in psychoanalysis. Therefore the anxiety he mentions is not the simple concern of a physician who might mistakenly interpret a symptom in the context of his specialty when it ought to be treated by another specialist. It was the anxiety of a maverick who could expect his colleagues to reproach him for engaging in psychotherapy at all. This would have been the self-evident meaning of this passage to the medical and scientific readers Freud had in mind when he wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Thus there is a curious lapse of logic when the paragraph continues,

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> If Irma's pains had an organic basis, once again I could not be held responsible for curing them; my treatment only set out to get rid of *hysterical* pains. It occurred to me, in fact, that I was actually wishing that there had been a wrong diagnosis; for, if so, the blame for my lack of success would also have been got rid of.

The question, however, is obviously not whether Freud could be "held responsible for curing" Irma's symptoms, but whether he was responsible for Irma's *not* having been cured. If there had been a wrong diagnosis, surely he was responsible for that too. If he had mistaken an organic illness for hysteria, and if he treated Irma in psychotherapy when she should have been treated for an organic ailment (as may have been the case), then he would indeed have been responsible for the persistence of her symptoms. Freud twice repeats the thought that he wished for a misdiagnosis to exonerate him. And this repetition does make a curious sort of sense within the logic of dreams. The confusion begins to clear when we read Freud as having equated his life with his scientific odyssey (metonymy or condensation). It is dispelled if we understand the physician in the dream to have been preoccupied with solving the riddle of hysteria; more interested in solving this riddle than in curing the patient (Irma as a metaphor or displacement). This possibility exposes another dimension of Freud's anxiety represented in the dream. Not only might he be anxious about practicing an unrecognized therapy and placing himself under suspicion of malpractice, he might also be anxious about violating the Hippocratic oath in not putting the welfare of his patient first. His consuming interest in solving the riddle of hysteria and finding a niche for himself in the history of medical science entailed this risk.

Before condemning Freud for his callous treatment of Irma, however, let us remember that we could equally well congratulate him for persevering in his quest despite this anxiety about her. And the dream text does represent him anxious about her too.

What would be a crime for another, less ambitious doctor reveals itself to be a heroic gesture for Freud. The passage represents Freud with a choice: to admit that his therapy has failed to dispel Irma's symptoms and turn her over to another physician (like Otto), or to persevere in his quest for an understanding of hysteria even if he cannot cure Irma. He chooses the latter course. The risk of malpractice could not be avoided if he would solve the riddle of hysteria. A more timid physician (like Joseph Breuer) would have

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turned back at this point. But the author/dreamer does not. He dramatizes himself as the anxious but undaunted hero who perseveres in his quest. His scientific odyssey is a higher mission even than curing the patient.

The dreamer's anxiety about not having taken his patient more seriously (placing his scientific ambition before Irma's welfare) opens onto a concern about his medical responsibility generally. Irma's symptoms remind him of other cases in which he made the wrong diagnosis or prescribed inappropriate medicines. He had brought patients into unnecessary danger and even hastened the death of several, including a personal friend. Freud observed, "It seemed as if [in the dream] I had been collecting all the occasions which I could bring up against myself as evidence of lack of medical conscientiousness." The several occasions on which his patients had died involved the use of inappropriate dosages of drugs, particularly cocaine. This reminds him of his having been the first to recommend the use of cocaine in eye surgery, and the fact that this recommendation had "brought serious reproaches down upon me." These, of course, were the reproaches of his fellow physicians.

The dream provides many other details, however, that Freud interprets as expressions of a compensatory desire to place his physician colleagues in embarrassing positions. According to Freud's reading, the dream-text makes Otto responsible for Irma's enduring symptoms. He had apparently given her an inappropriate injection with an unclean syringe and thus caused the infection from which she now suffered. This not only serves to assign responsibility to Otto, but (Freud does not note this explicitly) also locates the inception of her infection in the period of her vacation, that is, after her last visit to Freud—effectively exculpating Freud even from the responsibility of failing to notice the organic basis of the symptoms.

Dr. M.—the senior colleague to whom the dreamer appeals in the dream (and for whom Freud wrote out Irma's case history the night before the dream)—is also ridiculed. In the dream Dr. M. opines that Irma does in fact have an infection; according to the dream interpretation, he thus excuses Freud and his method of treatment. But Dr. M.'s statement that the infection did not matter, since dysentery would supervene and eliminate the toxin, is nonsensical. This, apparently, was an expression of the dreamer's wish to mock Dr. M., by depicting him as a fool.

Freud concludes his interpretation of the nonsensical utterance of Dr. M. with the suggestion that the dreamer was deriding his

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senior colleague for being ignorant of hysteria. A further reflection ensues: "Does Dr. M. realize that the symptoms of his patient (Irma's friend) which give grounds for fearing tuberculosis also have a hysterical basis? Has he spotted this hysteria? Or has he been taken in by it?" He infers from these thoughts that putting the nonsensical words into Dr. M.'s mouth in the dream was a form of revenge for Dr. M.'s disapproval of Freud's treatment of Irma in psychotherapy. It is a short step from this to the realization that the interpretation accomplishes revenge against all three, Irma, Otto, and Dr. M.

In all three cases the dream represents a desire to make a substitution: Irma's friend for Irma, Leopold for Otto, and Freud's unnamed friend (Wilhelm Fliess, it has since become apparent) for Dr. M. The thematic substitution is more important, but not so clearly emphasized by Freud in his interpretation: the dream represents a desire to exchange his own ridicule of other doctors for their disapproval of his practice of psychotherapy. Of course the dream is more forthright about shifting the blame from the dreamer to Irma—blaming her for the persistence of her symptoms. But it no less certainly shifts the blame for misdiagnosis and malpractice from Freud to other physicians, and it transposes their disapproval of him into ridicule of them. The dreamer's displeasure with Irma, Otto and Dr. M. seems to have been aroused by their skepticism about his psychotherapeutic treatment. So the dreamer accuses all three of ignorance of hysteria. In Freud's interpretation, therefore, the dream represents a scenario of vindication. Just as the preamble begins by intimating Freud's anxiety about being the inventor of a new practice of psychotherapy, the interpretation concludes by vindicating him and his invention.

Freud's interpretation of the dream of Irma's injection represents therefore a wish fulfillment of its own. The interpreter/dreamer tells a story of an unrecognized hero on a tortuous voyage of discovery, enduring multifarious temptations and reproaches. This is a story that Freud told about himself throughout his life. In later years Freud was quick to minimize and even reject popular recognition, preferring instead to portray himself as an unappreciated discoverer of unpalatable truths. Of course, the representation of Freud as unrecognized for his epoch-making discoveries (and enduring the hostility of the world) became an important feature of the psychoanalytic legend. This feature of the Freudian mythography has been scrutinized rather carefully in re-

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cent years and found somewhat inaccurate. It is simply not the case, for example, that *The Interpretation of Dreams* went unreviewed and unacknowledged. But it *is* remarkable that the seed of this myth of the unrecognized Freud should already appear in the text of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It is a curious thing that this text that established the portrayal of Freud as the unrecognized genius should have appeared in the very text for which he was to be recognized as a genius.

Perhaps Freud portrayed himself (to himself at least) as the unappreciated genius of psychotherapy as early as 1895, in the dream of Irma's injection. Certainly he portrays himself as such in the interpretation of the dream-text published in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899. Erik Erikson may be right in his speculation that Freud dreamed this dream in order to analyze it and give credence to his theory, but Freud *must* have written it down and analyzed it for the rhetorical purpose of representing himself as the unrecognized genius.

To make his journey, the dreamer/physician has had to put the norms of his profession in abeyance. He had to suspend his allegiance to the Hippocratic oath in favor of his quest for the solution to the riddle. This is the most dangerous terrain in the dream-text as well as the interpretation, the point at which Freud seems to take the greatest risk. It is the point at which he is most vulnerable, the point where even the logic of interpretation falters and takes on the characteristics of a dream. But dream-text and interpretation demonstrate this to have been a risk worth taking. The mystery of the patient's persisting symptoms is solved along with the riddle of hysteria in the end. And doctor and patient may live, in the logic of narrative structure, happily ever after.

Finally, merely to indicate that Freud was aware of the mythical import of the dream of Irma's injection, I cite the famous passage of Freud's letter to Wilhelm Fliess, dated June 12, 1900. Nearly five years after he had dreamed it, and six months after the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud and his family were spending their vacation in the house in which he had originally dreamed the dream of Irma's injection. From there he wrote to Fliess,

> Do you suppose that someday a marble tablet will be placed on the house, inscribed with these words?
>
> *In this house, on July 24th, 1895*

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the secret of dreams was revealed
to Dr. Sigmund Freud.
At the moment there seems little prospect of it.

This fantasy (which might itself have been a dream) contains the patent expression of another mythopoeic wish. But looking beyond Freud's ascription of historical importance to his successful interpretation of this particular dream, the concluding phrase of this letter further illustrates my interpretation. Here too Freud represents himself as the (undeservedly) unrecognized genius/hero and solver of the riddles of dreams and hysteria.

* * *

Perhaps it goes without saying that *The Interpretation of Dreams* is the master-text of psychoanalysis. But if this book is central to psychoanalysis, its rhetorical shape underscores the extraordinary importance of Freud's interpretation of the dream of Irma's injection in both the book and the discourse of psychoanalysis. Disregarding the large and diffuse first chapter that neglects even to introduce the author's thesis while summarizing the extensive literature on the subject of dreams, the book really begins with the brief second chapter on the dream of Irma's injection. This chapter introduces the thesis and argument of *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a whole. Here Freud shows that dreams *are* interpretable. He also demonstrates that his method of interpretation supersedes the traditional (popular, unscientific) methods of dream interpretation. And he indicates his hypothesis that dreams are always expressions of wish fulfillment.

The later chapters of *The Interpretation of Dreams* are a series of extensions and amplifications of the ideas expressed in the second chapter. They can be read in any order, as long as one has read the second (and perhaps the third). Every other section of the book refers directly back to the second chapter rather than building upon the intervening chapters, as would be the case in a book with a linear argument. It is not impertinent to say, therefore, that the chapter containing the dream of Irma's injection is the real starting-point of psychoanalytic discourse: both Freud's scientific argument and his myth of himself as the unrecognized genius were first published here. Rhetorically it is the most important single chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. A metaphoric description of the strategic position of the second chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* is found in the first sentence of the third chapter:

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> When, after passing through a narrow defile, we suddenly emerge upon a piece of high ground, where the path divides and the finest prospects open up on every side, we may pause for a moment and consider in which direction we shall first turn our steps. Such is the case with us, now that we have surmounted the first interpretation of a dream.

Here we have a metaphor of rhetorical compression that illuminates the relationship between scientific argument and the mythopoesis of Freud in this chapter. The second chapter is indeed a narrow one, where two rhetorical projects are entwined so closely as to be inseparable. Of course, Freud's dream and its interpretation are presented merely as an extended example of the theoretical argument, apologetically, as though they had no importance of their own. Ostensibly the dream-interpretation is given only because it is required by the argument about dreams being expressions of wishes. But once there, it requires the reader's attention to Freud's person. The narrow defile is the rhetorical situation in which the reader must tacitly assimilate the Freudian mythography if he or she is to surmount the explicit argument. The mythography, of course, is inscribed palimpsestically, beneath the scientific argument about dreams being expressions or representations of wishes.

This subtext is an autobiographical one. As I have already suggested, the interpretation of the dream of Irma's injection entails a case history of its author, however implicit. It is the story of a genius, which in turn belies the contention that this is the dream of an approximately normal person. The multifarious clues that this is the story of a genius restore our attention to the case history of the author.

Our interest and attention to the case history of Freud is of a different sort than our interest in the scientific argument of the book, of course. While the theoretical argument of the chapter presenting the analytic hypothesis about dreams is quite explicit, the mythical narrative of the hero Freud is presented implicitly, almost surreptitiously. The importance of the mythic dimension of the dream-interpretation is further hidden by its status as example (as opposed to theory.) But as with the latent content of dreams, the apparently suppressed and subordinate dimension of the dream interpretation is the more powerful: the scientific argument of the interpretation purports to contain the story of the dream as an example; but the myths evoked in the dream-interpretation threaten to explode the boundaries of the argument, the chapter and even the book. However, the

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fact that the mythical Freud is presented narratively—and in a fragmented narrative at that, requiring the collaboration of the reader's fantasy to complete it—makes it more insidious than the chapter's explicit argument.

Readers still approach this powerful chapter with the desire to understand and perhaps enter into the discourse of psychoanalysis. Even if they remain skeptical, their reservations are structured against the argument of the book rather than the person of its author. The effect of Freud's deploying the dream of Irma's injection as a subtext is thus to disarm the reader. It inserts the Freudian mythography beneath the surface, as it were, of the reader's rhetorical defenses. Only by stopping at this point and putting the explicit argument of Freud's interpretation in abeyance (and interpreting the interpretation instead) does the mythopoeic dimension of the chapter become apparent. But even this does not disentangle the two dimensions of the text. It merely reveals their interrelationship. It becomes apparent that while the primary (scientific) argument of the chapter is a vehicle for the subtextual mythopoeic narrative, the obverse is also the case: the mythopoeic moment energizes the scientific argument and carries it beyond itself.

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BOOKS

ROTH'S BEST NOVEL

THE COUNTERLIFE. By Philip Roth. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $18.95.

Our best writer, Philip Roth, thinks the least of us, that is when he catches us in some believing posture, and it is in such postures for the most part that he has chosen to catch us, in the often antic prose of his new novel. It is the best prose we have had from any novelist since Faulkner.

I was greatly taken with Roth's first book, *Goodbye Columbus*; then I went with him through the jokes in *Portnoy's Complaint* and the Zuckerman sagas, but with considerably less admiration. Now, with this new novel (also about Zuckerman), Roth emerges from my past judgement of him as someone I especially want to write about. In fact, had I read *The Counterlife* before it was sent me for review, I would have volunteered to review it, which might well have been unwise. Editors are almost as a rule suspicious of a literary enthusiasm they have not themselves suggested.

One reason for wanting to write about Roth's new novel is that the critics, however they commended the book, did not know how to discuss it. What was Roth up to? About this they were most unclear. William Gass, in *The New York Times Book Review*, put forward the notion that Roth is affirming, or at least relying on, an extreme form of postmodernist idealism, possibly of Richard Rortyish pragmatism. Now I don't find this notion helpful. And why should there be any problem, for a critic in dealing with this humorous, always interesting, and brilliantly constructed novel?

One difficulty—this is what bothered Mr. Lehmann-Haupt (also of *The New York Times*)—is that even at the novel's conclusion we are not at all sure what has happened in it. Did Nathan Zuckerman's brother, Henry, a dentist, die of a triple bypass operation, or was it Nathan who was operated on and died? And which of the two goes to the other's funeral, hoping, and not asked, to give the eulogy?

That we cannot answer these questions in no way distracts us while reading or hinders our pleasure, having read. There is of course one pleasure we cannot have: the pleasure of being sure. But it is possible to enjoy being left partly in the dark, which is how we find ourselves at the end of *The Counterlife*, as after the film made

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from Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, during which our unclearness as to what was occurring on the screen made some of us like the film all the more.

For it is not what happens but the attitudes taken towards what may or may not happen or have happened that interest the novelist and should interest his readers. To be sure, Nathan and Henry must really go to Israel if readers are to locate them there, and find out their attitudes towards the state, also towards the Israeli extremists. But did they both go to Israel? Did Henry not go? If dead, how could he have gone? Did Nathan go? And does he just imagine he found Henry there, transformed into a follower of the fanatical, much-worse-than-right-winger, Mordecai Lippman? Does it matter? What counts, and whatever counts here counts comically, is the attitude we watch Henry assume, also the attitude Mordecai Lippman makes dramatic as we listen to his wild harangues. And we do listen, for his rhetoric is gorgeously comical.

Equally eloquent are the railings of Shulik, the Israeli journalist, who is against everything that smacks of madman-Zionism. Probably Shulik's sentiments are rather close to the novelist's but this, too, hardly matters. The novelist is not interested in our hearing the different, opposed positions, he is not telling us what he thinks, he is telling us of his hate. And his ire is not aroused by any position taken, but by someone's belief in whatever position he took. What provokes Roth's derision is belief as such, and never its object, be that God, literature, dentistry, Christendom, Norman Mailer wrongdoing of whatever epoch, Irving Howe goody-goodying of whatever period. What is wrong is believing, not what is believed. Thus Roth is not so much against God as against praying to God, which, to him, means licking God's ass.

What does Roth have against believing? In Israel (assuming he is really there) Nathan has this thought about his brother: "What if Henry has signed on with the Jewish cause without believing a word? Could he have become that interesting?" But some men have thought that it is interesting, even infinitely interesting, to believe. Goethe, when asked which periods of history were interesting, replied that it was the periods when people believed in something. But Nathan Zuckerman and his creator Philip Roth are not living in one of those periods when people's beliefs may have made them interesting. Philip Roth, like his character, is living in our own period of history, and from Roth's latest book I take it that he thinks

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anyone in this period who believes in anything ought to be derided. And not amiably, or with understanding. The feelings expressed by Roth against believers are feelings of contempt or disinterest, which always add up, as Bernanos said, to hatred.

How does Philip Roth know that believing makes the believer worthless? He attempts to make a belief imaginatively his, and once his, he knows it is valueless. Could he have made it his own if it had real worth? Yet he is egotistical enough to think that if it is not for him it cannot be a good to anyone. He is like a man of odd proportions trying on suit after suit; none fit him, and from this he concludes that none of the suits will fit anyone. The beliefs by which men have lived and even died expose them to Roth's deriding glance as mistaken, unapropos, and ridiculous. Men who believe anything are there to be laughed at. Women Roth regards somewhat differently. For them he has a certain respect.

Why does Roth's judgement of women differ so markedly from his judgement of other men? Perhaps women do not represent for him possible beliefs, even if in fact they believe in something; unless feminists, they are less likely than men are to take marching orders from their beliefs. Then, too, there is this fact: it does not help to take women by storm, they remain inaccessible. One cannot become a woman for even a few moments, as one can become an American patriot, a dentist, a Zionist, a terrorist, or a convert to Evangelical Christianity. Roth, like his protagonist Nathan, seems totally without the desire (rampant in novels nowadays), to fourletter men, leaving only women to be fourlettered. But whatever may motivate Roth's feeling for the difference between males and females, the women he presents in his novels are almost always interesting. In *The Counterlife*, the portrait of Maria, the woman Nathan woos but for the most part does not sleep with, and for whose sake in one version of the text he undergoes the bypass operation that kills him, is wonderfully drawn. We hear her talk, and her tact and charm and intelligence come through instantly as she speaks, and we feel no need for detailed description. What may be absent from the portrait actually adds to its effect on us, as do the missing lines in a drawing by Ingres. And we begin to understand why in order to fourletter her physically Nathan is ready to undergo the operation which kills him. (In one version of what happens, we have a modern *Liebestod*: life, the novelist says, is exchanged for an erection.)

Is there any link, one may ask, between Roth's disregard for

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believing males and his attraction to and respect for women? And by a link I mean something more than a fact of this sort: he has heard more Jewish men davening than Christian girls caroling. Now I do think there is a connection between Roth's dislike of believers and his liking for women. I find it to be the residue of a vague radicalism, left over from positions more clearly held in the past. To act with other men one has to hold a belief of some kind, and if no belief unites you with others, you are quite free to deride them. But sex can unite you on occasion with a woman you have chosen, or who has chosen you, thus opening the way to the joys of fourlettering. Is the slogan to be "Let's deride and fourletter"? But in saying that one is no doubt repeating—in contemporary terms—the leftist slogan of the sixties: "Let's make love, not war."

So much for whatever politics one can find in *The Counterlife*. I would rather call attention to other, clearer, and more general notions operative, if not stated, in the novel. Nathan Zuckerman makes no distinction—Hannah Arendt thought this distinction of the utmost importance—between the doing of a deed and the making of an object. Nathan makes literary objects, books, and never distinguishes these from deeds done. Thus it is that in his conflicts with others the odds almost always favor him. When he pits himself against his brother the dentist he thinks of the latter's acts of dentistry as cruder versions (than his) of an effort to communicate. What does Henry's drill tell his patients? What consolation can a patient find in the shine of his forceps? And in dealing with the Israeli fanatic Mordecai Lippman, he never considers that the man may be involved in actions important to him and to other Israelis, maybe even to Nathan. When he and Mordecai meet it is not in hand-to-hand combat, as in days long past when deeds were respected. They meet on the modern stage, which Nathan understands better than his opponent. They go at one another not sword against sword, but manuscript against manuscript, and Nathan's, those already published and famed, and the ones he is preparing, already certain to be praised, cannot but outmatch the cruder productions of Lippman, who does not think of his bitter words as the first draft of a text to be published. Nathan, less naive, knows that this is what Lippman's words are.

In Nathan's draft for a novella to be entitled *Christendom*, found in his apartment after his death, there is an account of his marriage to Maria and of their separation. The novella assumes that Nathan has been operated on successfully, and has become potent. He has

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impregnated Maria; she is carrying his child. They have gone to Christmas services with her mother and her sisters, after which they have a tremendous fight. This is brought on by the anti-Semitism of Maria's mother, revealed rather nastily to Nathan by Maria's sister, Sarah. They argue—and I think Maria wins the argument. She, too, is a writer, and according to Nathan, a better writer than he. Now in the speeches they make to each other and in the letters they write after Maria has walked out, they clearly put the force of literary expression above the hope of being reconciled. Their preference for expression over living has brought them together. And it decrees that they must part. Not that like Rhett Butler and Scarlett, they do not understand each other. Nathan and Maria understand themselves and each other, yet they must part. They have eaten of the fruit of the tree of literature. Can they spend their days in a garden?

A great book is in some ways like a disaster: it tells us, as disasters do, just how things stand. Everyone knew that nuclear power is dangerous. It took Chernobyl to tell that we didn't really know what we thought we knew. Roth's novel tells us of disasters of the spirit we may have guessed at but not grasped as he has. *The Counterlife*, like *The Sun Also Rises*, sets the horizon for a whole generation, and I think Roth's generation is less likely to find a traversible path than was Hemingway's, called "lost" by Gertrude Stein. At least in the twenties it was not impossible to think of good writing as a way, and of literature as giving form to life. But Roth has inherited—as we have—a world, in which one of the problems of living is that life is now much too literary, and even for those who do not write. But in fact, who is there now who does not write, or at least think of writing? Who is not subject to the problems imposed by writing, which the writers we admire surmount? And how can the less gifted surmount them? We look with longing into the past, when actions were admired, and deeds held better than words. But now when there is practically nothing to be done, and nothing anyone can think of doing, is the last word to be with words?

In *The Counterlife* as in *The Sun Also Rises* what is inescapably real is impotence. Jake, the hero of Hemingway's novel, is physically impotent, while the other characters are simply unable to love. In Roth's novel, the impotence of the hero, Nathan, and of his brother, is said to be physical, induced by a drug for which there is no other substitute than the operation which proves fatal to both in the different versions of the event. But whatever the cause of

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Nathan's impotence, he is the cause of impotence in others, as Falstaff's wit causes wit. Nathan's fame as a writer makes his brother incapable of writing even a letter, also of finding satisfaction in his work, which in turn becomes the reason he needs other women and finally the operation that ends him. What of Maria whom Nathan wants to love? She is just delighted that Nathan is impotent. She has her husband to fourletter her, and she takes pleasure in fourlettering Nathan mentally, as her sister, Sarah, points out. But Lady Brett, in Hemingway's novel, wanted Jake to make love to her. It never entered her mind to fourletter him mentally and have Cohen or the matador, or both of them, fourletter her physically. Compared to Nathan, Jake and Lady Brett were naive. They even enter a church and wish they could pray, while Nathan derides believing Jews and Christians alike. He tries to make the Israelis he meets in Israel impotent Zionists, and Jews in general impotent in their effort to find some meaning in Jewishness. The only time he feels he is Jewish is when he is accusing Maria, along with her mother and sister, of anti-Semitism, an accusation Maria interprets as aimed as taking from her all power to love. At the climax of their quarrel, Nathan, who has come to think all Jews mad, is called a "mad Jew" by Maria. So there is to be no more fourlettering of her by him or of him by her, spiritually or physically.

I want to look back once more at Hannah Arendt's description of social trends made in *The Human Condition* almost three decades ago. The trends she pointed out in warning are much more advanced today than when she told us that the bureaucratic socialist state on which we verge prevents any kind of independent action. In such a society, the making of objects, scientific, commercial or artistic, substitutes itself systematically for the doing of deeds. In such a context, the maker of books, even of fictions, will have a great advantage in any confrontation, for his opponent, without his prestige or literary gift, will have as little ability to act, also as little access to ideas requiring action. With all these advantages, what will the writer, the maker have won? If there are no deeds to story, of what shall the storyteller write? If life goes finally counter to life, will a novel, even one like *The Counterlife*, still be possible?

LIONEL ABEL

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MORE PSYCHOHISTORY

FREUD FOR HISTORIANS. By Peter Gay. Oxford University Press. $17.95.

In his largely autobiographical preface Peter Gay tells us that he first became interested in psychoanalysis "as a system of ideas and an auxiliary discipline" some thirty years ago, and that he entered the Western New England Institute for Psychoanalysis as a research candidate ten years ago, undergoing a didactic analysis lasting several years. Professor Gay is, therefore, not an analyst turned historian, nor indeed an historian turned analyst, but a lifelong historian convinced that certain psychoanalytical ideas can and should be used by historians to illuminate the past. As a result, as he himself says, he occupies a vulnerable, threatened position; the history establishment is on the whole hostile towards psychohistory while "most psychoanalysts can scarcely repress their suspicions of what they think of, a little grudgingly, as applied analysis. The psychoanalytic historian must be prepared to face skepticism from Freud's followers almost as much as from his denigrators."

To the present reviewer, who could at a pinch claim to be an historian turned analyst, it appears that the problems faced by Professor Gay and other psychohistorians arise from two facts; first, that there are so many pasts and therefore so many branches and kinds of history; and, second, that human nature is so various and variegated that psychoanalysis, to the extent it has achieved a conceptual framework that reflects this variety, has generated so many ideas. As a result, anyone venturing into the troubled waters of psychohistory has to discover and select which psychoanalytical ideas are relevant and appropriate to the period or branch of history he wishes to study. (Presumably an analyst turned historian might proceed oppositely and select a period of history which seemed to him to exemplify with peculiar clarity some psychoanalytical idea he wished to popularize and illustrate. This is indeed what Erik Erikson did in *Young Man Luther*.)

Now Professor Gay is at present engaged in "a study of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture from a psychoanalytical perspective" (*The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*; six volumes, of which two, *Education of the Senses* and *The Tender Passion*, have

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already appeared), and I see no reason to doubt that the particular set of psychoanalytical ideas he recommends to the attention of historians in *Freud for Historians* is in fact the appropriate one for his particular enterprise, but he is, I think, wrong in implying, as he does, that it is the set required by all historians or even that it constitutes the central core of psychoanalytical thinking.

The psychoanalytical concepts Gay wishes to propagate among historians are roughly those which Freud developed in his later writings from 1920 onwards and from which contemporary psychoanalytical ego-psychology derives: the idea that the mind is a tripartite structure, consisting of the id, which contains two groups of instinctual drives, the sexual and the aggressive, the ego which is adapted towards the outside world, and the superego, which contains precipitates of parental and other authority figures; the idea that groups are held together by the identifications of their members with one another and with an idealized paternal leader; and the idea that the ego uses a variety of defense mechanisms to protect itself from being overwhelmed by sexual and aggressive drives and that civilization is based on repression and sublimation of these instinctual drives.

Although these Freudian concepts are clearly and often elegantly described, I doubt whether Gay's presentation of them will fire the imagination of historians in the way that he hopes it will. This is largely because he fails to give adequate accounts of a number of earlier and more basic Freudian concepts without which Freud's ego psychology appears static and unimaginative; Gay has little to say about fantasy, symbolism, sublimation, guilt, and anxiety, and I doubt whether any reader of *Freud for Historians* not already familiar with psychoanalysis would grasp that, in Freud's view, the id and the ego function in entirely different and incompatible ways, the former using images and symbols ordered according to what he called the primary processes (condensation and displacement) which ignore the categories of space and time, the latter using words ordered discursively according to the rules of logic and syntax. Nor would he discover that many contemporary analysts think Freud assumed too sharp an antithesis between the ego and the id and their respective modes of fuctioning.

In concentrating so exclusively on one particular phase in Freud's thinking—and indeed in entitling his book *Freud for Historians*, not *Psychoanalysis for Historians*—Professor Gay has, I

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think, failed to use his historian's imagination. If he had approached psychoanalysis not as a single set of ideas produced by one man but as an intellectual movement which began in a specific milieu at the end of the nineteenth century and has expanded and developed in various directions in various countries—and has displayed, like so many other movements, internal contradictions and divisive tensions—he might have discovered that psychoanalysis has explored more areas of human experience than are accounted for by Freud's ego psychology and has produced other clusters of ideas which could well be of as much if not more use to historians as the one to which he has restricted himself.

Two in particular strike me as being likely to be of interest to historians. First, there is the literature which elucidates the origins and the interrelationships of the various emotions of self-regard and the sense of identity—raised and lowered self-esteem, pride, shame and humiliation—emotions which Freud, with his preoccupation with guilt, did not consider in detail. Fortunately for historians the best and most illuminating book in this area, Helen Merrell Lynd's *Shame and the Search for Identity*, is the work of an author who, though well-informed about psychoanalysis, was nonetheless deeply grounded in literature and history. The psychodynamics of pride and shame should, it seems to me, be of particular interest to historians studying nationalism, militarism, chivalry and gentility.

Secondly, there is the psychoanalytical tradition of concern with depression, despair, grief, mania, elation and ecstasy. This tradition started with the work of Karl Abraham in the early 1920s and is at present represented by the object-relations school, which flourishes in Great Britain and is beginning to attract attention in the United States. Professor Gay has certainly heard of this school, since he mentions representatives of it several times, mostly in footnotes, but he has not, I think, appreciated the extent to which it diverges from the phase of Freud's thinking to which he is attached, and it seems not to have occurred to him that the psychology of depression and mania—and such concepts as the depressive position and manic defense—could be of use to historians in general and of particular interest to historians of totalitarian, religious and chiliastic movements.

CHARLES RYCROFT

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THE LAW AND THE MEDIA

RECKLESS DISREGARD: WESTMORELAND V. CBS ET AL; SHARON V. TIME. By Renata Adler. Alfred A. Knopf. $16.95.

For a writer about the First Amendment, Renata Adler has a bizarre—almost religious—sense of "the Truth." A major thesis of her book, *Reckless Disregard*, is that *Time* Magazine did not tell the Truth about General Ariel Sharon's responsibility for the Phalangist massacre of Palestinian civilians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps; and that CBS did not tell the Truth about General William Westmoreland's role in allegedly concealing enemy troop estimates in Vietnam. Another thesis of her book—even more bizarre and wrong-headed—is that the First Amendment is somehow supposed to protect relatively small, highly moral and dissenting voices (such as those in the civil rights movement), but not "unitary powerful and monolithic [news organizations] like *Time* and CBS which are guilty of suppressing the very diversity that it was the purpose of the First Amendment . . . to protect."

Indeed Adler advocates "different standards for small than for large publications" and argues that the First Amendment victories of the giant press do not help to protect small publications. Her flawed reasoning is that "even if all large publications were to win their cases, small publications would be *in no way* protected" (emphasis added), since rich libel plaintiffs could still sue them and ruin them on legal costs alone." What she neglects to tell the reader—and as a sophisticated lawyer, she has to know this—is that the protective legal precedents established by the large publications govern the cases brought against the small publications. There is also developing law which punishes—by court costs and other financial sanctions—frivolous libel suits brought in the face of dispositive precedents. Thus the large publications, for better or worse, are often the vanguard of protection for the First Amendment rights of small publications as well as for individual citizens.

Adler is correct, of course, in reminding us how incredibly arrogant and hypocritical the giant media can be in their self-righteous and self-serving defense of *their* rights under the First Amendment. She does a masterful job of documenting the sometimes shoddy reporting that went into the *Time* and CBS accounts, and the unwillingness of *Time* to acknowledge its serious mistakes. (CBS was far

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more willing to admit—at least internally—that its program was seriously flawed in its methodology, if not its conclusions). In a powerful final coda, she devastates CBS and to a lesser extent *Time*, as well as their lawyers Cravath, Swaine and Moore, for trying to intimidate her publisher into "suppressing or at least delaying publication of the book." The spectacle of these great defenders of the First Amendment attempting to use the threat of libel suits against a book which criticizes their defense of libel suits brought against them by those whom they criticized, is enough to bring joy to the heart of anyone, like this reviewer, who is skeptical about our ability to determine the Truth with finality or absoluteness.

An important assumption underlying our commitment to freedom of expression is that truth is a process, not a product. I am confident that Thomas Jefferson would have understood and enjoyed the old Jewish folk-tale about the rabbi who was conducting a domestic-relations court in a small Eastern European shtetl. A young rabbinical student had been sent to observe the sage at work. First the wife spoke: "Rabbi, my husband is a terrible man. He stays out all night, drinks away his salary, beats me, and doesn't clean up after himself." The rabbi pondered for a moment and then offered his rabbinical conclusion: "My daughter, I have listened to you and you are right." Then the husband spoke: "Rabbi, my wife is a shrew, she screams all day and night, she won't sleep with me, she can't cook, and she keeps the house a mess." The rabbi again pondered and offered his view. "My son, I have listened to you, and you are right." The student leaped up and shouted, "But, Rabbi, they can't both be right." The rabbi pondered for a moment and then responded: "My son, you are right."

Jefferson, who was somewhat more of a skeptic than the rabbi, probably would have told everybody they were wrong, but the point would have been similar and reflects an important premise underlying our First Amendment. The most basic right under that charter of liberty is "the right to be *wrong*," and indeed the need to err on the side of wrongly criticizing government and other powerful institutions rather than wrongly withholding such criticism.

Renata Adler, after persuasively demonstrating that both CBS and *Time* were probably wrong—at least in their methodologies and details, if not in the thrust of their stories—jumps to the questionable conclusion that "neither the ninety minutes [of the CBS broadcast] nor the paragraph [in *Time*] should have been broadcast or published. . . . " She also believes that neither law suit should have

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been brought, or if brought "aggressively defended." In my view, she is wrong on nearly all counts.

The offending speech should have been broadcast and published, even at the risk of error. Obviously if that risk could have been reduced—and the risk of error in fast-breaking controversial stories of this kind can rarely be eliminated—it would have been, as all responsible journalists would choose to do so. But the subjects of the stories were both high-ranking military leaders with enormous followings, power, and access to the media. Being attacked, even being wrongly attacked, comes with the job description, as Harry Truman so aptly reminded us with his famous kitchen metaphor. Both General Sharon and Westmoreland chose to remain in particularly hot kitchens, giving orders which caused the deaths of numerous young soldiers and civilians. If they were wrongly accused of certain terrible actions—and I am prepared to assume they were—they had ample opportunity to present their accounts in the marketplace of ideas. And they did, repeatedly and angrily. Even persuasively! But when CBS and *Time* refused to retract their accounts, the Generals sued. And the media defendants vigorously defended their constitutional right to broadcast and publish what they believed to be true. Ms. Adler wishes they had rolled over and played dead, instead of hiring a law firm—both hired the same firm—that attacks its opponents like "a pack of Dobermans, who are clambering to be unleashed." But that too is part of our constitutional system of adversary justice. Once a controversy turns into a libel case, it should be treated like a case capable of setting a terrible precedent for First Amendment freedoms. General Sharon too was represented by a ferocious tiger, Milton Gould, one of the most formidable litigators in the country. Not surprisingly, the *Time*-Sharon case ended in a draw. The jury found that *Time* had defamed Sharon by printing a false story, but that the reporter had been negligent and careless rather than malicious or reckless. The CBS case resulted in an unconditional surrender by Westmoreland. Adler succeeds in convincing the reader that this surrender was the fault of Westmoreland's inept chief counsel, an inexperienced right-wing cause lawyer, rather than a reflection of the weakness of his legal case, or the Truth of the CBS report. We are led to believe that had the lawyers in that case been a match, perhaps it too would have ended with an equivocal result reflecting what Adler believes to be the Truth—namely, that CBS, like *Time*, doctored the underlying

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facts to present a newsworthy scoop that the true facts would not have supported.

Adler ends her book by referring to a story she uses as a metaphor for the two cases. She tells of an earlier libel against General Sharon by an Israeli newspaper which had exposed a "scandal." The exposé was that Sharon had erected an expensive fence around his personal home and had improperly charged the cost to the government. Sharon denied that there was a fence and asked the Israeli "press counsel" to check and determine whether there was indeed any fence. The press counsel issued a report denouncing Sharon as an evil brute, but concluded—almost as an afterthought—that "there is no fence."

Renata Adler categorically informs us that in both the CBS-Westmoreland and *Time*-Sharon cases "there was no fence." In transferring this metaphor from a simple controversy over a single observable (indeed photographable) fact, to a pair of the most complex epistemological disputes in recent history concerning moral responsibility, perceptual communication and the theories of knowledge, Adler reveals her own naiveté about the Truth.

I, for one, am glad the stories were run, the denials issued, the law suits defended vigorously, and the book written. Each of these exercises in free expression and advocacy contributed to the marketplace of ideas. The public now knows more about both sides of the Sharon-*Time* and Westmoreland-CBS controversies, more about the foibles and fallibilities of the press, more about how lawyers litigate libel cases, and even a bit more about how writers, like Renata Adler, can select and manipulate facts to support a strongly-held point of view. I cannot claim to be glad that the libel suits were brought to court, because such suits—regardless of how they are resolved—sap the First Amendment of some of its vital ability to leave controversies to the marketplace of ideas where they belong. No court will ever determine the Truth about Vietnam or Lebanon. That is not the judicial function. The most the courts can do—and they did it relatively well in these two cases—is to help keep the process of "truthing" untrammelled so that our citizens can make up their minds about controversies—or, better still, to keep them open.

ALAN DERSHOWITZ

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EPITAPH FOR A SPYMASTER

HERE LIES: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. By Eric Ambler. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $16.95.

Readers of spy fiction fall, it sometimes seems, into two broad categories: those who really like the stuff and those who keep wanting it to transcend itself. The latter pledge their allegiance to John Le Carré, never mind the prolixity and ponderousness of his later manner. The former swear by Eric Ambler.

It was Ambler who paved the way for Le Carré's morally ambiguous tales of introspective bureaucrats and inevitable betrayals; the George Smiley novels could not have been written had Ambler not staked out the territory first. But even as he revolutionized the thriller, transforming it from a species of romantic fluff into a politically-savvy vehicle for sustained suspense, Ambler never sacrificed its built-in attractions. He traded in real fear and palpable danger rather than in the make-believe thrills of an amusement-park ride, and the effect was to enhance rather than diminish the genre's entertainment value.

One hallmark of Ambler's novels, from *Background to Danger* (1937) up to *The Care of Time* (1981), is a cool, understated prose style that efficiently serves the exposition of his plausibly complicated plots. Even his lesser efforts proceed at the right pace and end exactly where they should. By contrast, an unkind critic might say that inside many an overweight Le Carré novel there's a lean, clean thriller struggling vainly to be free.

The punning title of Ambler's admirable though tight-lipped memoir makes its point about the author's wry reserve: *Here Lies Eric Ambler*, as though what followed were the ironic epitaph of a spy writer convinced that "only an idiot believes that he can write the truth about himself." The book begins like a pastiche of an Ambler thriller done with poker face for maximum impact. Having run his car into a ditch between Geneva and Lausanne, the author, then seventy-two, escaped injury except for a mild case of "amnesic aphasia"—precisely the predicament that befalls Theodore Carter in Ambler's *The Intercom Conspiracy*. Of what was the hero thinking in those last moments of consciousness on the autoroute? And why does the hospital doctor question him so closely?

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The patient, it transpires, has temporarily blocked out the singularly depressing memory of a promotional tour he'd taken in the United States. The lesson, for one who believes in "living by his wits," is plain. Never again, Ambler vows, will he subject himself to the importunate questioners, "local wiseacres, rogue literati and aha-school instant analysts," who would pin him wriggling on the wall. This book, instead, will serve as his answer to those oft-asked questions: "How much fact is there in your fiction? What makes you tick?"

How much fact? A great deal, though not in any straightforward autobiographical sense. Ambler was born in London in 1909, the son of vaudevilleans, and his peripatetic early career sounds rather happy-go-lucky in the telling. His training as an engineer, at a technical college and later at the Edison Swan Electric Company, would come in handy. It is evident in the delight he takes, both in his fiction and here, in describing how things work—whether the "thing" in question be a bomb or a Caribbean coup, an ad campaign for a dud product or a complicated industrial process. The insistence on precisely factual particulars lends his scenarios, real or imagined, their authority.

What Ambler did to make ends meet in his pre-thriller days makes lively reading, though it doesn't quite prepare us for his books. About the time he put in as a music-hall entertainer (as accompanist for a "semi-pro concert artist"), an unsuccessful playwright ("After the first act I wanted very much to leave"), and an advertising copywriter (at a rival agency to the one for which Dorothy Sayers worked), he writes with a careful attention to detail and an unsettling ability to reproduce or replicate the conversations of long ago. Attitudes are intimated rather than broadcast loudly; the speaker remains unflappable.

One episode stands out in the episodic narration. On a vacation in Marseilles one summer, Ambler was fleeced at poker by a local barman. Out of money, he confined himself to his hotel room and "planned an assassination" to take his mind off his hunger. From his window he pointed an imaginary rifle at a spot where the barman was likely to walk. "It was quite a shock, a few weeks later, to see on the newsreels that same piece of the Canebière with the intersecting tramlines," Ambler writes. "The spot I had chosen for my sniper shot at the barman had also been chosen by the Croatian assassin of King Alexander of Yugoslavia." A foreshadowing of fictions to follow? In-

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deed. "In the Mediterranean sunshine there were strange and violent men with whom I could identify, and with whom, in a way, I was now in touch."

Here Lies comes abruptly to an end with the passing mention of *Judgement on Deltchev*, Ambler's first postwar (and anti-Stalinist) thriller. But his reputation was made long before then. *A Coffin for Dimitrios* and *Journey into Fear*, written on the eve of World War II, set the standard by which all subsequent spy novels—including, somewhat to his irritation, Ambler's own later works—are routinely judged.

Ambler invented the modern spy novel just as Dashiell Hammett fathered the hard-boiled American gumshoe romance—in reaction, in both cases, to the niceties of formal puzzles and games of intrigue. Raymond Chandler said that Hammett "gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse." Ambler gave espionage back to the people that conspire for a cause, not just to provide the convenient pretext for an international crisis. He had one significant precursor: the Somerset Maugham of the Ashenden stories. Before Ambler built on Maugham's example, espionage in fiction was largely a matter of drawing-room intrigue, madcap escapades, and elegant secret agents on whose heroic shoulders the fate of Western civilization depended.

"It was the villains who bothered me most," Ambler writes in *Here Lies*. "Power-crazed or coldly sane, master criminals or old-fashioned professional devils, I no longer believed a word of them." As for the typical hero, "he could be a tweedy fellow with steel-grey eyes and gun pads on both shoulders or a moneyed dandy with a taste for adventure. He could also be a xenophobic ex-officer with a nasty anti-Semitic streak. None of that really mattered. All he really needed to function as hero was abysmal stupidity combined with superhuman resourcefulness and unbreakable knuckle bones."

The Dark Frontier (1936), Ambler's one apprentice novel, began in the spirit of parody and ended by approximating the travestied material. A subtler pattern was enacted in the five prewar novels that followed. *Background to Danger, Epitaph for a Spy, Cause for Alarm, A Coffin for Dimitrios* and *Journey into Fear* invoked familiar conventions only to subvert and, hence, revivify them. Ambler played against stereotype, casually reminding us of what the stereotype was. Were Soviet agents invariably "sinister figures with beards," as Marlow in *Cause for Alarm* supposes? Enter Zaleshoff, with his

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reassuringly American accent, to shepherd Marlow out of danger, though only after deploying him first in a hazardous scheme to sow discord between the two Axis powers. Not by accident did Ambler cast Charles Latimer, the protagonist of *A Coffin for Dimitrios*, as the mild-mannered author of popular detective novels. Here he will encounter "*real* murder: not neat, tidy book-murder with corpse and clues and suspects and hangman, but murder over which a chief of police shrugged his shoulders, wiped his hands and consigned the stinking victim to the coffin."

For setting, Ambler chose exotic but seedy locales, cities like Istanbul and Milan, Sofia and Belgrade; for the uglier-than-sin villain, he substituted a succession of deliberately prosaic thugs. Vicious but essentially featureless were the assassins in black velour homburgs in *Cause for Alarm*, the hired killer reeking of cheap scent in *Journey into Fear*. Of the latter we're told, and it's a recurrent theme, that "his very insignificance was horrible. It leant a false air of normality to the situation." The menace in Ambler's thrillers was ever in inverse proportion to the apparent "normality"; the threat of violence, the logic of its inevitability, loomed far greater than the actual violence depicted. Ambler always placed a portion of his emphasis on who paid for the bullets. Espionage was business by other means: behind the eponymous desperado of *A Coffin for Dimitrios*, Ambler's most famous criminal creation, stands the resources and prestige of the "Eurasian Credit Trust."

It's a paradox of Ambler's spy novels that their protagonists are invariably rank amateurs; Ambler, like Hitchcock, favors variants on the wrong man theme. Unlike Le Carré's professionals, Ambler's prewar protagonists are versions of his ideal reader, ordinary chaps thrust willy-nilly into extraordinary predicaments. The complacent ballistics engineer in *Journey into Fear* and the nervous production engineer in *Cause for Alarm* are alike in being innocents abroad who get disabused of their illusions despite wishing hard to cling to them. The education of these politically-neutral Englishmen begins once they cross the Channel and learn "that civilization was a word and that you still lived in the jungle."

The aim of the exercise was, in part, to shatter the reader's complacency. Ambler's titles themselves told a story: the *Background to Danger* was everywhere in the European thirties, the *Cause for Alarm* immediate. The European jungle lived by the application of Nietzschean principles. "What a man does depends on what he needs," says a character in *Journey into Fear*. "A man is an ape in velvet." Strip

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off the velvet and you get a man like Dimitrios, whose existence is proof, as Charles Latimer begins to realize, that Good and Evil "were no more than baroque abstractions. Good Business and Bad Business were the elements of the new theology. Dimitrios was not evil. He was logical and consistent; as logical and consistent in the European jungle as the poison gas called Lewisite."

Latimer is brought back, after a thirty-year hiatus, only to be killed off in *The Intercom Conspiracy*, Ambler's 1969 thriller, which has just been reissued in paperback (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux). It's as if, as Europe thaws out from the cold war, a relative innocent like Latimer can no longer expect to survive the mischief he stumbles into. What's missing from the book is terror; but it makes up for the lack with its sheer sophistication. Two veteran NATO hands conspire to blackmail rival intelligence outfits by taking over a disreputable right-wing newsletter and using it to leak highly classified information. The novel becomes a parable of the mimetic relationship between nominally antagonistic intelligence operations. In the world it depicts, each side knows the other's secrets but knows also that "the conventions must be observed and the pretenses maintained, that outsiders may not look in on our foolishness and that both sides have a common enemy—the small boy who saw that the emperor was naked." The point has been made often in the years since *The Intercom Conspiracy*, and often enough by intelligence insiders. That, too, is a strength of Ambler's thrillers: they're like predictions couched in the past tense. Events generally prove them right.

DAVID LEHMAN

FASCISTS LEFT AND RIGHT

FRENCH FASCISM: THE FIRST WAVE, 1924–1933. By Robert Soucy. Yale University Press. $25.00.

If French Radicals are the radishes in the modern political garden ("red on the outside, white at the center"), French fascists are the bad apples; grown in Paris and the provinces, they come in many colors and go rotten to the core. The militant nationalist movements of the 1920s and 1930s in France were not imported

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from across the Rhine or over the Alps. Like Belgium, Britain, Rumania or Spain, France cultivated its own varieties on native soil, and did so early. In fact, increasing numbers of historians and political scientists are tracing the origins of European fascism, not to Mussolini, but to the national socialists of the French fin-de-siècle, crusaders against a Third Republic riddled, they insisted, with "rapacious" Protestants, Freemasons and Jews. If Wagner and Nietzsche, vulgarized by disciples, helped plant the cultural roots of Nazism in Germany, their contemporaries, the professional anti-Semite Edouard Drumont and the novelist of national regeneration Maurice Barrès, prepared the political ground no less effectively in France. Their defense of a Fatherland threatened by unfettered liberalism and bourgeois decadence was a blend of intense nationalism and, most timely, socialism. Anticapitalist, anticonservative, and with an appeal to masses suffering the dislocations of urbanization and industrialization, French fascism, goes this interpretation, was not a movement of right-wing reactionaries; it was born on the left and it stayed there to flourish and to flounder through the interwar years.

Robert Soucy is out to revise that view. With other historians on both sides of the Atlantic, he challenges the notion, best articulated by Zeev Sternhell, that fascist movements were "more leftist than rightist in nature." While Sternhell sees fascism as an attack on the old bourgeois order and defines its history as an "incessant effort to revise Marxism," Soucy considers many of the extreme nationalist leagues and parties of the 1880s through the 1930s as fundamentally conservative; the tactics and style of the radical and moderate right differed (one called for quick, often violent "action", the other for reform), but they shared some of the same social and economic goals; they had a similar hierarchical view of French society, and, crucial point, they often dipped into the same coffers. Like the recent round of academic debates over who financed Hitler (was he a tool of the capitalists or their taskmaster?), Soucy examines the controversy over who paid the fascists' way in France and concludes that the bankers who lent to the piper called the tune. To a great extent, this first of two volumes is written for—and about—present scholars and their views on the fascist past.

Soucy agrees with Sternhell and others that protofascist movements emerged at the turn of the century (the royalist *Action Française* dates from the Dreyfus Affair), but insists on 1924 as the year of their dramatic debut. In reaction to the victory of a Socialist

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and Radical coalition in the French Chamber (the *Cartel des Gauches*), conservatives of all stripes rushed to defend the status quo from what they feared to be a dress rehearsal for Gallic Bolshevism. Groups like the *Légion*, the *Jeunesses Patriotes*, and the *Faisceau*, far from being variations on socialism, were part of a "middle class backlash to Marxism and to the Third Republic that had allowed it to grow." Soucy admits, however, that after the *Cartel*'s defeat in 1926 and measures taken by a new moderate government to end the financial crisis, conservative support for right-wing groups declined and the first wave of fascism ebbed. (His next volume will follow the second wave through the Depression years and, one assumes, onto the shores of Vichy.)

Individual chapters introduce the leaders, shock troops, and financial backers of the principal fascist organizations, and concentrate on their impressive growth in the months following the *Cartel*'s victory. Drawing on police records recently made available, as well as on newspapers, manifestos and memoirs, Soucy studies the fascists' words and deeds, their public promises and private agendas, and maintains that only their rhetoric was radical leftist. Sweeping attacks on plutocracy and bourgeois decadence might attract disgruntled shopkeepers, but they were anemic plays at populism, and they cloaked the essential goal: the defense of traditional conservative interests and values.

A long chapter on the psychobiography of *Faisceau* leader Georges Valois is disappointing in its reductionism, but other passages, on women and fascism for example, are illuminating; for Soucy, they support the view that reactionary ends were more important than radical pronouncements. While the *Jeunesses Patriotes* called for women's suffrage (still an unresolved issue, of course, in pre-World War II France), all fascist groups required women to remain obediently domestic and bear children as prolifically as possible. The point is valuable but hardly proof of conservatism; for there were few in France—left, right or center—who thought otherwise.

These insights, like Soucy's lists of the bankers and businessmen who contributed to authoritarian organizations, confirm both the usefulness of his book and its shortcomings. Providing solid information on origins and administrations, and a splendid summary of rivalries and competition for funds and followers, the author covers mostly old ground and paints familiar portraits of the usual suspects. The right-wing predilections of that champagne and cognac combination, Taittinger, Hennessy and Martel, were never

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in doubt, nor were the odious choices of the perfumer François Coty. It's a rogues' gallery of culpable reactionaries, but their pictures have long been hung and the sting of accusation is gone.

If the aim is to emphasize "connections between the social and economic bases of French fascism and its social and economic goals," and to suggest that much of the leftist rhetoric of fascist propagandists was "manipulative sloganeering," Soucy has succeeded. The book is a good, though incomplete response to Zeev Sternhell and others. If in the process, however, Soucy wants to show that while all conservatives were not fascist, most fascists were conservative, he fails to convince. For reasons of self-interest or fear of social revolution, some conservatives offered temporary support to committed fascist organizations. The majority did not, however, and many who did withdrew funds, not only when the economy stabilized but when their blue-shirted, black-bereted clients turned to violent attacks on parliamentary institutions.

In the extremity of their actions, fascists created a chasm between themselves and other political actors over which very few conservatives would care to cross. Highlighting desultory alliances and downplaying significant differences between the conservative and radical right, Soucy distorts his otherwise lucid and informative picture of French fascism in the years before the fall.

MICHAEL BURNS

POETS' WORK

HALF PROMISED LAND. By Thomas Lux. Houghton Mifflin. $13.95
THE THEORY & PRACTICE OF RIVERS. By Jim Harrison. Winn Books. $7.95.
GOING NORTH IN WINTER. By Franz Wright. The Gray House Press. $4.95

In Thomas Lux's *Half Promised Land*, many of the poems concern social relations, especially work: not just the dull labor we do to survive in this world, but also the work we must do to survive ourselves. The collection opens with a scene of agrarian beauty—"The Milkman and His Son" dragging a sled of discarded milk bottles across the snow-covered fields of the family farm. They haul these empties to the dump:

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which was lovely then: a white sheet
drawn up, like a joke, over
the face of a sleeper.
As they lob the bottles in

the son begs a trick
and the milkman obliges: tossing
one bottle in a high arc,
he shatters it in midair

with another. One thousand astonished
splints of glass
falling . . . .

The breaking of the glass enables the poem to break out of the naive, Currier-and-Ives-like setting. The trick represents the unexpected and astonishes the glass itself. The milkman is being playful, yet, if you will, he demonstrates to his son the *art* of breaking bottles. Although he misses nearly half:

Along with gentleness,

and the sane bewilderment
of understanding nothing cruel,
it was a thing he did best.

The development of the theme of work can be traced throughout *Half Promised Land*. In "Empty Pitchforks" the elemental struggle is both economic and biological: "There was debtor's prison before inmates/ there was hunger prefossil/ there was pain before a nervous system to convey it to the brain. . . ." The premises and promises of this Half Promised Land are instilled in the schools that contradictorily teach admiration for literature and art, yet steer students toward other vocations. "You go to school to learn/ to read and add, to someday/ make some money." ("You Go To School To Learn") For in poverty there is the danger of becoming the "Pedestrian" met on a thousand street corners.

Tottering and elastic, middle name of Groan,
ramfeezled after a hard night
at the corpse polishing plant, slope-
shouldered, a half loaf. . . .
. . . .

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His fear is of being broken,
of becoming too dexterous in stripping
the last few shoelaces of meat
from a chicken's carcass. . . .

Although some positions on the food chain are more enviable than others, the most basic reason for work is to feed ourselves. It is not coincidental, then, that *Half Promised Land* should include the work of animals whose principal occupation is survival.

I hate to see it: a bird so crafty, so sure,
moving in where it's easier to eat
and then grow dim. What logic
sends them here and not so far away
only field-hands know them? Maybe
they come to us, to live among us
so they can claim it as their choice—
which makes them proud and bright,
though does not cease their doom,
nor preserve their haughty, haunting cry.

("The Crows of Boston and New York")

He tells of "The Thirst of Turtles":

Both wise and clumsy, like us, feeding
in ever-widening or diminishing circles

and "Tarantulas on the Lifebuoy" who are saved through human intervention, and of:

. . . an owl
soaring home after the shift he loves,
a fat sack of field mice under his wing.

("The Night So Bright A Squirrel Reads")

Like Theodore Roethke's work, Lux's poems are given to moody apprehensions, yet they celebrate the earth. A poem that begins with "Like a wide anvil from the moon the light" concludes:

here's to the clouds the color of bone,

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here's to the indecipherable path home,
here's to the worm's sweat in the loam. . . .

("Like a Wide Anvil from the Moon the Light")

The animals are an integral element in the half promised land: they are reminders of the nature of brutality and the human longing for grace. If there is to be peace in the heart, it might be among them.

His job is honest and simple: keeping
the forest tidy. He replaces
after repairing, the nests
on their branches, he points every pine needle north. . . .

("His Job Is Honest and Simple")

The last poem, "Triptych, Center Panel Burning," recapitulates the concerns of the book. The first section deals with farm life, an uncle's odd sense of humor, the devotion of parents, a cruel neighbor boy, and what seemed in the poet's childhood a more ingenuous and generous America.

The second section, the panel that's on fire, contains some of Lux's more powerful writing, a fusion of image and statement.

Is true that you get born dumb and bald as a ball-
peen hammer and as bald
and dumb you expire. So it's. In between
you choose to live in a manner you can live with.
. . . .
Like a black piece of cheese you want to give back
all the lies and crooked imaginings. . . . all the sad
homilies. . . .
. . . .
the knitting needles plunged into your ear
to quiet the mind's terrible machine. . . .
. . . .
you have to pass it back/not on. . . .
. . . .
the stupefacients fed us daily,
the quotidian humiliations and the rare
humiliations, all that which causes
the terrors, the bloody taciturnity, all
the blink-blown, irrevocable severings. . . .

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After "the terrors," in the final section the author prays for the capacity to continue feeling, no matter the cost. He concludes the poem with a paradoxical vision: the creation of the universe, a destruction.

> there was a coin of light; no voice inside
> or further inside, not one choirboy did appear;
> it was only a light made up of particles of light,
> it was just a black table soaked
> in light and then the black broke down,
>
> split apart, dispersed with a purpose - like drops
> of blood borne off a battlefield
> on the backs of ants, and following: rain, rain.

In a decade in which much of the poetry being published seems merely decorative, solipsistic, or willfully obscure, it is a pleasure to read poems that quicken the senses and challenge the reader. *Half Promised Land* is an excellent book.

Chapbooks are often poorly distributed and seldom get reviewed, yet they are an honorable tradition in the world of letters. *The Theory & Practice of Rivers* by Jim Harrison is a handsomely produced volume and contains many fine drawings by Russell Chatham.

Harrison's work is also influenced by Roethke, and like Roethke, Harrison hails from rural Michigan. The title poem occupies most of the text. It is a long poem of tributaries, dams, and diversions.

> It is not so much that I got
> there from here, which is everyone's
> story, but the shape
> of the voyage, how it pushed
> outward in every direction
> until it stopped. . . .

He meanders to the cities and people he has loved along his way. In these voyagings he accumulates strength. His sentiments are a mixture of the gruff and the tender. Harrison is most sure in his descriptions of nature, his ability to create a correspondence with it.

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. . . I saw
the ocean river and the sharks hanging
under the saragassum weed lines,
a blue river in green water,
and the sharks staring back, sinking
down listlessly into darker water:
the torpor of heat, a hundred low tide
nights begging a forgetfulness
I haven't quite earned.

Through backwaters, flood plains, and the river towns of Europe and the Americas, the reader of poetry discovers *The Theory & Practice of Rivers*. The poems in this collection *are* earned.

Going North In Winter is a letter-pressed, hand-bound pamphlet of ten poems by Franz Wright. In this little edition he creates a tone which is quiet, yet commanding—and very disconcerting. The work has a haunting and mysterious presence. The short poems are dramatically enhanced by end- and mid-punctuated lines, a craft that slows the poems down and gives them an eerie quality.

Joseph Come Back As The Dusk

1950–1982

The house is cold. It's raining,
getting dark. That's Joseph

for you: it's that time
of the day again.

We had been drinking, oddly enough.
He left.

I thought, a walk—
It's lovely to walk.

His book and glasses on the kitchen table.

Despair and loss are countered by the need for salvation, which most often arrives in the crystallized form of an image. He is the "strange elderly child" ("Untitled") brooding in the empty house, waiting for a loved one to return. His poems fill the emptiness. It was necessary for him to write them: they are his work. "The way I work is strange./ . . . you would not call it work/ . . . work is not the term . . ./It destroys me, I adore it."

STUART DISCHELL

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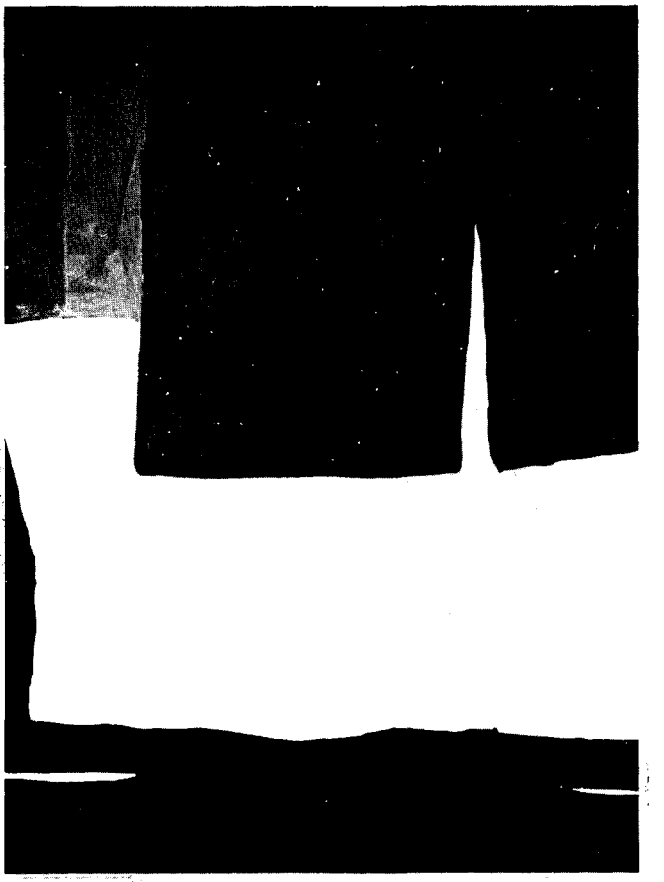
Helen Frankenthaler has generously contributed a commemorative poster to celebrate our fiftieth anniversary.



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